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I

THE FAIRY DOLL [LA POUPÉE]

*Translated from the French of Jean-Galli de
Bibiena by H. B. V., with an Introduction by
Shane Leslie*

II

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF A NIGHT [LA NUIT ET LE MOMENT]

*Translated from the French of M. de Crébillon
le Fils by Eric Sutton, with an Introduction by
Aldous Huxley*

III

THE QUEEN OF GOLCONDA AND OTHER TALES

*Translated from the French of Stanislas-Jean de
Boufflers by Eric Sutton, with an Introduction by
Hugh Walpole*

IV

ANGOLA: AN EASTERN TALE

*Translated from the French of Jacques-Rochette
de la Morlière by H. B. V., with an Introduction
by Augustus John*

V

RAMEAU'S NEPHEW
AND OTHER WORKS

*Translated from the French of Denis Diderot by
Mrs. Wilfrid Jackson, with an Introduction by
Compton Mackenzie*

VI

THE PROPHET'S COUSIN

[LE COUSIN DE MAHOMET]

*Translated from the French of Nicolas Fromaget
by Eric Sutton, with an Introduction by Charles
Scott Moncrieff*

VII

THE MASKED LADY

[LE MASQUE]

*Translated from the French of Joseph Durey de
Sauroy by Eric Sutton, with an Introduction by
André Maurois*

VIII

ALL THE BETTER FOR HER!
AND OTHER STORIES

*Translated from the French of Claude-Henri de
Fusée de Voisenon (de l'Académie Française)
by H. B. V., with an Introduction by Ralph Straus*

IX

THE COACHMAN'S STORY
AND OTHER TALES

*Translated from the French of Anne-Claude-
Philippe de Tubières, Comte de Caylus, by Eric
Sutton, with an Introduction by George Saintsbury*

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No. 204

SPLEEN
AND OTHER STORIES

SPLEEN

AND OTHER STORIES

Translated from the French of

PIERRE-VICTOR, BARON DE BESENVAL

By H. B. V.

With an Introduction by

HAVELOCK ELLIS

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NOTE

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INTRODUCTION

I

BESENVAL was French in training and tradition, but on his mother's side Polish. That is a fundamental fact we must always bear in mind. So it is as well to state it at the outset.

The Besenvals originated in Savoy, but had settled at Solothurn. In the seventeenth century a Besenval left Switzerland to enter the service of Louis XIV, by whom he was ennobled. His son, a Baron and our Besenval's father, was for many years Minister of France to Poland. In 1707 he had been sent on important negotiations to Charles XII, then at a serious moment in his headlong career, and to him M. de Besenval proposed various schemes in the interests of France. But, though he was a skilful diplomatist, the influences were against him, and Marlborough, who speedily appeared on the scene, negotiated otherwise. Besenval returned to France, and at his death was a lieutenant-general and the colonel of the regiment of Swiss Guards which his son later commanded. He had married, late in life, Countess Bielinska, who was closely related to the Leczinski family, and therefore to the queen of Louis XV; she was a woman with a charm and wit which, a few years after her marriage, impressed even Voltaire. Their son, Pierre-Victor, the Baron de Besenval we are here concerned with, was born at Solothurn, at the foot of the Jura, when his father was fifty and his mother thirty-seven, in 1721.

Young Pierre-Victor came into the world with the finest native qualities and under the happiest

conditions. These qualities and conditions largely took the place of any formal education. We hear of a tutor, but on the whole the world was his teacher, and it seems to us to-day that there could not have been a better: that is the second significant fact about Besenval. When we first hear of him, at the age of nine, he is already a cadet in his father's regiment, and at the age of fifteen he was in the midst of the campaign of 1735. While still a boy he displayed the Besenval temper of intrepid courage, fearless alike of dangers and of horrors—though remembering how skilfully he conducted his life, we may hesitate to call him rash—and even at this period, with his combined bravery and charm in leadership, he was the idol of his men. In the years that followed he played an able and brilliant part in many engagements, fortunate and unfortunate, in the Low Countries and elsewhere, and later went through the Seven Years' War. When peace was signed he returned in middle age to Paris, where in due course we find him a lieutenant-general, decorated with the Grand Cross of Saint-Louis, Governor of Hagenau, and Colonel of the Swiss Guards. He showed his fine military qualities, not only in war but in peace, by the reforms in discipline and organization which he introduced into the army, not without difficulties and opposition, and his own Swiss regiment became a model for imitation. But there is no reason to suppose that Besenval had the special qualities of a great commander: he even had a poor opinion of war and admired the Quakers. Thus he turned from the camp to the Court with at least equal relish for the arts of peace, as much at home in the boudoir as in the tent, though with an air of freedom and frankness which seemed *mauvais*

ton to some super-refined aristocrats of the old school.

We may say, indeed, that it was for civilization, for society and the arts, that Besenval was best endowed. There is a fine portrait of him in early life (still in the possession of the family, and reproduced by Schmid), wearing armour; it shows a peculiarly attractive face, feminine one might be inclined to say, and with melancholy in the eyes, but it is not weak, and the chin is well formed. Of tall and imposing stature, in old age dignified, and with naturally winning manners, he animated every circle he entered. He was often carried away by his natural impetuosity, even to violence: therein the French strain in him had not modified the high-strung excitability of the Pole. (Warsaw is the only city in Europe where in the best seats of a place of entertainment I have observed a man enter on a furious altercation that the whole house could follow.) But Besenval had the sensitive skill to repair quickly the mistakes he thus made. An incident is significant. He kept in his house an ancient servitor of the family, a certain Blanchard, assigning to him a few trifling duties so that he might not feel himself useless. One day Blanchard chanced to drop and smash a rare Cape jasmin which Besenval was cultivating. His master overwhelmed him with abuse and next day he declared he would leave the house. 'Leave me?' exclaimed the Baron; 'you, Blanchard? Never, my old friend!' Blanchard insisted. 'In that case,' said Besenval, 'here is the key: you have been here longer than I have; it is for me to go.' And the scene ended in the correct eighteenth-century manner by Blanchard falling at the feet of Besenval, who raised and embraced him.

We are not surprised to learn that Besenval was attractive to women, not only in youth but in age, when his whitened head, his epicurean philosophy, and his wide experience made him their trusted confidant. It is the kind of conventional statement we always expect to hear about the men of the eighteenth century. But like many other conventional statements it needs revision. We often forget that while it is the tradition of the Englishman to minimize the extent of his experiences with women, it has been the tradition of the Frenchman, especially in the eighteenth century, to magnify his success in that sphere. In actual fact there may be a difference, but it is a difference that is inconsiderable. The most typical men of the eighteenth century in France are usually marked by considerable fidelity in love. Crébillon, while developing in fiction the psychology of love, was industriously engaged with his official function of censoring improper literature in the respectable society of his plain though excellent English wife. The Chevalier de Nerciat, who is regarded by experts in this field as the most outrageously erotic writer of that age, was stated by his son to have been, 'nevertheless, the best of husbands and fathers'. The Chevalier de Boufflers, so representative and fascinating a character of the time, displayed for the charming Comtesse de Sabran, whom he married, a romantic attachment of forty years, of which the monument remains in their correspondence and diaries. And Besenval, while it is true that tradition regards him as the real father of the Vicomte de Ségur whom he made his heir, later became for twenty years the devoted friend of his neighbour in the fashionable Rue de Grenelle, the Marquise de la Suze. We know

little about her save that when he was in prison and the mob were clamouring for his head she had the courage to visit him in the Châtelet, and that at a later period she safely escaped to England. She was a woman of great beauty. A portrait of her exists in which a bust of Besenval (still extant) is seen in the background; and there is also in existence a portrait of Besenval with his head resting on his hand and gazing at a miniature which represents, according to family tradition, Madame de la Suze.

It is no doubt true that Besenval's cherished friends were often among the gay and brilliant young aristocrats whose dissipations he more or less shared, though he never shared in the meaner vices and low intrigues of the Court; he was never among the *courtisans des courtisanes* of the last sordid years of Louis XV. On the contrary, he could be scornful of the hypocrisy and pettiness of Court life. He had attached himself to Choiseul, whom he greatly admired, and when that minister left in disgrace he voluntarily accompanied him.

But when Louis XVI came to the throne Besenval became the exquisite embodiment of the tastes Marie Antoinette was bringing into fashion, some of which he encouraged and perhaps suggested. With his Swiss simplicity, Madame Campan remarked, he would have been capable of singing the *Ranz des Vaches* with tears in his eyes, while yet he was the most accomplished talker in the circle of the Duchesse de Polignac. The Prince de Ligne, who has set down incomparable pictures of the significant European figures of the dying eighteenth century among whom he moved as an equal, could not fail to write well of Besenval, 'handsome, insolent, and amiable', whose

'fine and frank air' enabled him to risk all sorts of audacities; 'no one was ever more brilliant than the Baron de Besenval, in war or in the Court, and his writings are as brilliant as their author.'

'His writings'? But nothing has been said of writings. Authorship, indeed, might well be the last thing to think of in connection with the Baron de Besenval, almost the last thing he would himself think of, for he was as modest about his writings as about what he called his 'good luck' in life, though the truth is that 'man is his own star', and by his own personal qualities his fate is mainly wrought. Besenval was a great amateur of life, using that word in its high, and not its vulgar, sense—a lover of life and the arts, with the knowledge and insight of love—and his sensitive and skilful hand marked everything he touched. He was a lover of Nature who never forgot the mountains of his birthplace and later became, it seems, a pioneer in the culture of exotic plants. He was a lover of the arts, an honorary member of the Academy of Painting, and he left behind a valuable collection of pictures. But our knowledge of his activities in these and similar directions is vague. His writings remain, though they were not written for publication and only appeared, through an indiscretion, some years after his death, in the early nineteenth century. They long failed to attract much attention. But it is on them that his reputation rests, and will continue to rest.

The *ancien régime* was now approaching its tragic fall. Besenval, who had become military commandant of the interior provinces of the kingdom, was at the height of his credit, the friend and adviser of Marie Antoinette, who consulted him about all her

affairs, small and great. (And when the Queen was ill with measles he was among the few special friends who sat by her bedside to amuse her.) Now over sixty, but retaining his fine and vigorous carriage, he still displayed the moods and habits of his youth, while adequately fulfilling his varied official functions. During the disastrous famine of 1788 it was Besenval's function to preserve order, and he carried out his duties with skill and consideration. Next year he was plunged into the revolutionary troubles, but as he was not in supreme command of his forces his position became difficult, for often he had to await orders which never arrived. For one moment Besenval was in the foreground of history. On the 14th July 1789 he was camped with his troops on what is now the Place de la Concorde, in military charge of Paris, including the Bastille. Every hour of that fateful day has been studied, but though Besenval's attitude is still not clear, he seems to have acted in an extremely difficult position with prudence and moderation. From that day on, dangers arose for him on every side, and as a measure of precaution the King at last ordered him to retire to Switzerland. On the first stage of the journey he was arrested, but Necker, then a popular idol returning from exile, met him on the way and secured his release. Later he was re-arrested and confined in the Châtelet, where his old spirit of gaiety and mockery sustained alike himself and his companions in misfortune. Finally Besenval was brought out for trial. It lasted long: there were 185 witnesses; crushing charges were brought against him, but his replies were so clear and the evidence so slight that, in March 1790, he was acquitted. Thus, by a final stroke of that 'luck' which was not all

chance, Besenval escaped the guillotine. His spirit was not killed, but physically he was now a broken man. He tried to live as of old: he gave a dinner party even on the day of his death, the 2nd June 1791. For a few moments he appeared among the guests, 'the ghost of the commander,' he smilingly said, in allusion to Don Juan, but he felt he had become a painful spectacle, and retired. An hour later he was dead.

II

As an author Besenval has usually been best known by his *Mémoires*. Strictly speaking, they are not so much memoirs as episodes, souvenirs of the things that had most deeply touched him, set down in the spare moments of living, for his own delectation. That is how they come to form so delightful a record, without apology or even explanation, of personal confessions. He tells the doings of other people as freely as his own, and that might make the tone of the *Mémoires* less delightful if we failed to remember their private character, for while every one is free to confess his own sins we are not free to confess other people's. That has been brought forward in Besenval's justification, but he left the *Mémoires* behind him, and I am not sure that in his free, swift, spontaneous temperament such considerations were prominent. He was apter to retrieve indiscretions than to avoid them, and these are retrieved by their natural good feeling and the absence of malice. In the last part of the *Mémoires* there is much explanation and defence of the part he himself played in public affairs. But it seems likely that this part is spurious, written, perhaps, by Besenval's literary executor, the Vicomte de Ségur, in his friend's interests. Such is the opinion of Dr. Schmid, and the mistakes in this part of the *Mémoires* concerning matters with which Besenval was familiar clearly suggest a lack of authenticity and would justify the statement of the family at the time of first publication that the *Mémoires* were not genuine, though for the main part they are now undisputed. So also is the fine quality which places them among the best that we

have of their period. Besenval writes with frank directness, with swift ease, but skilfully to the point, as one trained to the pen by the sword, the training of so many of the fine writers of Spain, though less often of France. We can understand how these *Mémoires* appealed to Stendhal. It is probably in the pages of Stendhal that most of us (though I can only speak for myself) first met the name of Besenval. I saw it there in youth and the name remained imprinted on my memory as of one whom I must learn to know. In due course I obtained the *Mémoires*, which remained with me. It is only in recent years that I have known the *Contes*, now at last brought before the English reader by so skilful a translator. In my youth, indeed, hardly anyone can be said to have known them. Like the *Mémoires*, they were not written for publication, and when in 1881 Uzanne reprinted them from the edition of 1806 he remarked that it would be a surprise to most people that Besenval had ever written any *contes*. They mostly date from his military days. In 1757 he was stationed at Drevenack, near Wesel, and a group of officers of cultivated taste formed there a literary club to which each furnished contributions in prose or verse. The chief impetus to Besenval's novels, as he called them, seems to belong to this period, although some, like his *Amants Soldats*, which is based on a real episode, are much earlier. Twenty years later he sent the chief of them, *Spleen* (afterwards to be recognized by Stendhal as one of the most charming lesser works of the century), to his friend the Royal Censor, the younger Crébillon, whom he evidently recognized as the finest writer and judge in this kind of literature. He told Crébillon

that he had written the story, first entitled *Le Malheureux*, as one writes a letter, without help and without corrections, to gratify the caprice of the moment and not to set forth personal misfortunes—'never having had any'. Crébillon's answer, too long to quote here, is a model of sagacity and fine criticism, which might alone suffice to show how far he was from the merely frivolous writer he was once reckoned. He appreciates the fine qualities of the story, understands the temperament of Besenval, and gives him excellent advice on style and composition. It is supposed that Besenval then revised *Spleen*, but the *Contes* were not published till long after his death, in 1806, as the fourth volume of his *Mélanges Littéraires et Historiques*, which in those changed and disturbed times attracted little or no attention. Besenval was, indeed, in every respect belittled or slighted (save by the solitary Stendhal) until recent times. It was not till 1913 that Dr. Oswald Schmid turned the light of genuinely critical scholarship on to Besenval and published an elaborate study of his life from original documents.¹

When we survey Besenval's career and activities as a whole, we are inclined to say that he was a man so variously accomplished that on whatever stage of life he found himself he would perform his part well. We see a man, in other words, who was—however gaily, skilfully, and spontaneously—playing at life rather than expressing his own inner self. That is how it came to pass that, though he was brought up in the army and became a brilliantly successful soldier, he easily abandoned the camp for the Court, and never

¹ O. Schmid, 'Der Baron von Besenval', *Schweizer Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft*, Bd. V. Heft 3.

cherished any high military ambitions. That, again, is how, though he achieved the highest social success, he was contemptuous of the courtier's life and realized the empty artificiality of Versailles. 'The perfect type of the French Chevalier' he has been called in modern times. Yet we see how he transcended that type. The severe simplicity of his Savoy ancestry, the high-strung extravagance of the Pole, the contacts of childhood with the mountains of Switzerland were not needed to make the typical French Chevalier of the eighteenth century.

There is one field of activity in which Besenval seems no longer to be playing a part. As a writer, it is possible to maintain, he was expressing his real and inner self. His other activities were social: he wrote for himself, not for the public, not even for posterity. When he sent *Spleen* to Cr billon he denied that it expressed his own outlook on life. That very denial arouses reflections. Besenval had no creative imagination: his stories are based on real incidents or adventures. Schmid believes that *Spleen* expresses himself. I entirely agree. When he writes in his own person his sentiments are those of the stranger in the Tuileries, and we recall the air of melancholy over that gay and eager face. Besenval was a very different person from Chopin, but it is instructive to remember how, in the composer, a rather similar racial mixture resulted, not only in similar fine accomplishment but in the like temper of gaiety inextricably interwoven with melancholy. It needs, indeed, little insight to observe how often sadness is concealed beneath the brilliant mask of high spirits.

Cr billon repeatedly referred to Besenval as a moralist. He was a moralist himself, as were nearly

all the most characteristic writers of the French eighteenth century who adopted the form of fiction, from Marivaux to Laclos. Indeed, one may well agree with Edmond Jaloux, the expert critic of French fiction to-day, that it is in morals that French literature, from Montaigne on, most conspicuously excels, and that ever since the eighteenth century it is in fiction, instead of in essays and maxims, that this tendency has most prominently and most continuously (with a few exceptions such as Flaubert) been manifested.

Born into one of the most formal and conventional periods of social life ever constituted, the eighteenth-century novelists and *conteurs* could not fail to see that the highly polished surface of life was failing to correspond to the vital necessities of the people who were more or less unsuccessfully trying to preserve its veneer, and they exercised on it their satire, playful or fierce, and the more philosophical among them put forward their proposals for re-forming society. The second half of the eighteenth century engaged its more serious members in a perpetual debate on morals, evoking among the rest a perpetual resentment, that broke out conspicuously against the *Liaisons dangereuses*, in which was seen, not the achievement of an austere moralist supremely endowed with the skill to transform morality into art, but an intolerable outrage. Then came the nineteenth century, with its own new and severely standardized respectability, looking back with superior wisdom on the problems which had impassioned its immediate predecessors as merely frivolous, and indecorous as well.

It is because moral problems have for the twentieth century again become vital and serious that we are

able to turn with fresh interest to the eighteenth century. We find Besenval, again and again, not with insistence but in the natural course, touching on the questions which the nineteenth century desired to regard as already answered, but which we to-day seek, as they sought in the eighteenth century, to face and answer for ourselves. When Besenval speaks of women, for instance, it is without the slightest impulse to idealize or to sentimentalize, but often with a real perception of their position and their problems, as in the 'Aventure de M. de Besenval avec une Dame de Wesel', not included in the present volume, in which it has not been found possible to include all the varied aspects of Besenval's activity. Again, near the beginning of the *Mémoires*, he narrates how two officers, living in a garrison and great friends, were frequent visitors at the house of a widowed gentleman with a beautiful daughter of eighteen. She became pregnant. The furious father asked the usual questions, and she replied that it must be one of the two officers, and if not the one, then certainly the other. The officers—recovered from their first surprise at finding themselves rivals, for each had honourably kept his secret—both eagerly offered marriage. But she could not choose between them: all she knew was that she loved them both, and could not sacrifice one to the other. The only escape from this embarrassing situation was to draw lots, with the private condition (carefully concealed from the father) that he who was not to be the husband should remain the lover, and no jealousy be aroused. This treaty was executed, with fidelity and to the happiness of all three, which lasted till, a few years later, there occurred the husband's death, deeply regretted

by both survivors, who thereupon married each other. But the point to be noted is that it is Besenval the moralist who is interested in this story, which culminates in his characteristic comments: 'It is hard to believe that chance ever brought together three people whose perceptions were so just, who so deeply understood the real value of things, and who were so free from prejudice. If human beings would but place reason before convention, justice before *amour-propre*, and good sense before wit, it would be much easier to live among them.'

Besenval is distinguished among the men of that age by the fact that he is at once a participant and a spectator of life, vividly interested in every activity that fell to his share, and yet a detached and critical onlooker. He has been coupled with the Chevalier de Boufflers, who also shared the superficial life of his time and yet preserved a deeper romantic nature of his own. But Besenval was of more penetrating and intellectualized temper. At times he even recalls Stendhal, the great spirit who bridges the ravines of romanticism and links the eighteenth century with our own age. The tone of Besenval is often the tone of Stendhal, by whom he was first genuinely appreciated; and if as an artist Besenval was a Stendhal *manqué*, we may perhaps say that in life Stendhal was a Besenval *manqué*. Yet even as writer and artist Besenval had certain advantages. He belongs to an earlier and, for us, deeply interesting age, of which he was in real life the brilliant representative. And at the same time—to come again to the point which we must emphasize—he was not only the active participant but the detached spectator: he looks on aloof at the life in which he actively shared. In

quality his *Mémoires* have been compared to those of Saint-Simon. They are mere fragments, and cannot fairly be compared to the sustained effort of the earlier and greater writer. But in one aspect they possess an attractive quality which he misses. Saint-Simon stands sternly and bitterly apart from the life he describes; Besenval, who notes down its characteristics with an almost equally pungent vivacity and veracity, allows us to see that he was himself living in it and taking part in it, so that he combines sympathetic intimacy with keen insight. That, we may be sure, was a quality which charmed Stendhal, and it is a quality which we may detect in the *Contes* as well as in the *Mémoires*. Maurice Barrès believed that the highest type in life is that of the man who is at once ardent and disillusioned. It is the distinction of Besenval, perhaps alone among the men of his age, that he completely realizes this type.

The problem of the fateful part which Besenval played in the events of that epoch-making day which is now the national holiday of France may be left to historians. But the Besenval, so long neglected or belittled, who has only been studied with care in our own century and now appears as an almost unique figure, still remains. That is the Besenval here presented to the English reader for the first time.

HAVELOCK ELLIS .

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
INTRODUCTION	xi
SPLEEN	I
THE SOLDIER LOVERS	99
ALONZO	121
THE HERMIT	147
A SPANISH STORY	155

SPLEEN

SPLEEN

WHILST strolling in the Tuileries I had often noticed an elderly man, very simply dressed and of modest, though somewhat sad, appearance, who, although he did not look unsociable, nevertheless seemed deliberately to choose the quieter and more secluded spots for his walks. One day, when I was by myself, I saw my man again, and kept him in view for some time; at length, yielding to my curiosity, I approached him.

‘Sir,’ I addressed him, ‘no doubt you think it very queer that I should interrupt your walk without having the honour of being known to you; but I will frankly admit that the trouble you take in these gardens to avoid the people in search of whom one usually comes here has made me very eager to know you. Ways which are not those of other people as a rule indicate an interesting turn of mind, and my greatest pleasure in life lies in studying the different motives that guide the activities of men.’

‘It is true, sir,’ he replied with a smile, ‘that a man who walks in the Tuileries and avoids heat, dust and crowds is certainly a rare creature. I am not surprised that he should rouse your curiosity. To satisfy it, I will tell you that of all places in Paris in which to walk I find these

gardens the most restful; that, in avoiding here the world which I detest, I find air and coolness with the advantage of being in a place which pleases me. If you are curious as to my identity I hope that you will be more successful than I have been. For forty years I have laboured unsuccessfully to try to know myself.'

This reply made me even more eager to continue the conversation.

I. To admit that one does not know oneself is to prove that one has examined oneself pretty thoroughly.

THE STRANGER. It at least shows honesty: and it has perhaps taught one that the heart of man is a maze in which one loses oneself, a chameleon which eludes the most minute and thorough search.

I. You are right; it seems to me, however, that there are situations in which the desires of man always follow the same course, and that there are certain determined characters that follow unswervingly the path they have chosen.

THE STRANGER. That may be so; but if you will reflect, you will see that the desires of man are always at the mercy of the influence of the moment and of circumstances. Sometimes this moment is prolonged and remains unaltered, and one gets an unmerited reputation for consistency.

I. What! Do you maintain that the men who steadfastly withstand the vicissitudes of a stormy life and die a courageous death at the end of it do not deserve a reputation for the greatest strength of character?

THE STRANGER. I maintain that pride is the motive power which animates them in the deeds which are done in the presence of other people; but follow them into their private lives. Are you going to tell me that this courage, this greatness of soul, is not shattered a thousand times against futile things which remain hidden from the public eye? Come, sir, you must not be imposed upon by comedies played on a vast stage. That is not the place in which to unravel the tangles of the human heart: it is in your own heart that you should look. All hearts are fashioned in the same mould, they differ only in their impulses.

I. Really, sir, your words only increase my eagerness to talk to you. May I be permitted to ask what profession you follow?

THE STRANGER. I have no occupation now, though I have tried a great many.

I. Your reply tempts me to put a number of questions to you which might perhaps annoy you.

THE STRANGER. In order to spare you that, I ask no better than to tell you a little of my

life: I only beg you to forgive me if I do not disclose my name or those of the people to whom I shall refer. I will give them names to make my story more easy to understand, but they will be fictitious ones.

As the younger son of a house of some importance, I was destined by my family for the priesthood. The education I received made my early years wretched enough. The knowledge which one must acquire for the state to which I was doomed calls for a great deal of tiring and very uncongenial study. One of my uncles, who was a bishop, undertook my education. He was a virtuous man, with a very highly developed sense of duty. In spite of my youth, I had a clear insight into his mode of life; I was appalled by the severity of morals required of the minister of a religion which he tries to make people practise and respect. The impunity with which so many bishops disgrace the priesthood did not reassure me. The self-contempt a man must always feel if he betrays his professional faith seemed to me to be the worst of all possible evils. Checked, however, by diffidence, the inseparable companion of early youth, I dared not admit the repugnance I felt to becoming a priest. Constantly harassed by this thought, I grew more and more morose. My uncle could not avoid noticing it, and it was not difficult for him to discover the

cause of my unhappiness. One day he sent for me to come to his study.

‘My dear nephew,’ he said to me, ‘I can read into your mind. Your wretchedness shows me clearly that it is not in accord with the career for which your parents have destined you. But think the matter well over: remember that a noble name is the only patrimony to which you can look forward; this is a great advantage when it is accompanied by sufficient wealth to uphold its dignity, but it is a heavy burden to drag through the mire of poverty. If you become a priest this wealth cannot fail to come to you, and whilst yet young you will acquire without any difficulty what you could not hope for in any other profession, even after a long life of toil and in the most advanced old age. If, however, you do not feel that you have the vocation necessary for this calling, do not hesitate one moment more, but turn your energies elsewhere. All the annoyance to which you will expose yourself by doing so will be as nothing compared to the misery of being unable to carry out, as a priest, the undertakings upon which you would embark in the eyes of the world.’

My uncle concluded as follows, his eyes raised to heaven:

‘Is it not a terrible thing that mankind insists that we should decide the whole fate of our lives

at an age at which no experience can possibly guide our choice?’

Encouraged by the lead given me by my uncle, I declared my real feelings to him. And shortly afterwards I returned to my father’s house.

I. I feel exactly as you do about the priesthood. The wealth that sometimes accompanies it does not seem to me to compensate one for its constant restrictions. What is a bishop’s life? To busy oneself with trifling and dreary details in the depths of one’s see; to seek the companionship of unhappy people; to deny oneself in order to give to others; to have to think before performing the most innocent action, for fear of scandal; to be in control over other priests who are for ever trying to evade one’s authority; to be given a temporal power of which one cannot rid oneself and which is constantly being assailed from all sides. But I implore you to proceed with your story, to which I am listening with the greatest interest.

THE STRANGER. When I arrived home, I found that my mother was dead. My father’s reception of me was anything but cordial.

‘I had dreamt of making you happy,’ he told me; ‘but since in your obstinacy you refuse to allow me to do so, I must do as you wish. You will have time to repent of the attitude you are

adopting to-day. In order that you may at once get used to the discomforts which are to be your lot, I do not want you to grow accustomed to the luxury of my home. I am not even going to put you into your brother's regiment, where you would still be too well treated. I have, therefore, obtained a commission for you in the regiment of one of my friends, and all that remains for you to do is to prepare to join it to-morrow.'

I. There is something incomprehensible about paternal tyranny. Of all the creatures that inhabit the earth, only men dare arrogate it to themselves. Is not a child's docility the result of the impressions of babyhood, of the habit it gets into of being dominated by its father, and of a sort of respect for his experience?

THE STRANGER. To a point, perhaps; but let me assure you that filial piety, of which such a virtue has been made, owes its origin nearly always to avarice, and to the wealth one hopes to inherit from one's father. That is the true basis of a father's tyranny and of the submissiveness of children.

My own father packed me off to Valenciennes, where my regiment was garrisoned.

My uncle's lessons had made more impression upon me than my father's harshness. Having shed the garb of priesthood for fear of not being able to fulfil its pledges, I devoted myself

wholeheartedly to the duties of the new profession I had embraced. By a great deal of energy and a certain show of intelligence I managed to get myself appointed adjutant, a post involving a great deal of trouble and work, almost immediately. I had, long before, formed the habit of thinking for myself, and I soon came to the conclusion that those who command others are in reality no better than slaves. Being always in touch with the men, looking after their wants, their health, their discipline, and instructing them in their duties, I recognized that I owed them everything, whereas, apart from obedience, they owed me nothing. Sometimes, overwhelmed by fatigue, I thought of the quiet life I had abandoned, without, however, a single regret.

I. I can well understand that the daily life of an adjutant is more tiring than that of a seminarist!

THE STRANGER. Yes, but it is far less tedious. I liked my profession, and I should have made light of my hardships had I been happy in other respects. But my superiors were, for the most part, almost imbecile. They blamed me for their own mistakes, and I often had to bear the brunt of their ill-humour. Exposed to the jealousy of my brother officers because my way of life was different from theirs, they made mock of my diligence. I endured their jeers for some

time; but one day, when I was more hardly pressed than usual, I lost my temper. I rounded on the individual amongst them whom I disliked most. He retorted sharply. I held my ground, and we arrived at the point where satisfaction had to be given. We fought. I received a sword-thrust through the body. My life was not such a happy one that I was frightened by the thought of death. In fact, I even looked upon my wound as a less vexatious circumstance than if I had killed my adversary and had been compelled, in consequence, to try to find a refuge against the rigours of the law, in some foreign country.

I. Because the same men who have decided that an insult can only be wiped out in blood have also framed laws to punish those who conform to this custom.

THE STRANGER. Do you think it any more reasonable that a man who is already suffering from another's taunts should be forced to risk his life to avenge himself? The Society of Man is nothing but a tissue of contradictions and distorted vision.

I recovered from my wound sooner than I had dared to hope. My duel had made something of a stir; and as soon as I began to go about again every one was eager to show his friendship for me. Amongst the women there was one who evinced such interest and joy at my return to

health that she made a deep impression upon me. She possessed many qualities calculated to touch the heart of a man of my age. Besides being extremely beautiful, she radiated the full glory of youth. Her charm was further heightened by a sparkling wit; in short, she was completely satisfying to me. I was dazzled by her, and lost no time in letting her know my feelings. These were so well received that very shortly there was nothing left for me to desire. You have yourself, sir, doubtless experienced the first delights of conquest; so I will not trouble you with the details of my happiness. I was so absorbed in it that I began to neglect my work. My colonel reprimanded me severely. I took the matter to heart and performed my duties with greater attention, without, however, allowing my devotion to abate. The only thing that suffered was my sleep, and I should certainly have broken down, had not a catastrophe occurred which I could not possibly have foreseen.

The gaiety of my mistress's character reacted upon my own. We mingled with our love little childish things that were natural to our age. One evening, knowing that she was not at home, I thought I would hide myself in her room to surprise her on her return. Hardly had I had time to find a hiding-place than I heard her come in. I was concealed only by a curtain, so that I could

easily see that she was escorted by one of my brother officers: nothing more natural. But what were my feelings when I saw this mistress whom I adored, and for whom I would have sacrificed myself a thousand times, dismiss her maids and lavish the most tender caresses on my friend, and then, adding ingratitude to treachery, forget herself to the point of making bitter gibes at my expense! I was so stunned by the shock that I remained for some time almost bereft of my senses. At length, pulling myself together, I came out from behind my curtain. You can imagine the effect produced by my sudden appearance. I adopted a cynical attitude, and although stricken with sorrow, I carried the situation off with dignity. You will perhaps be surprised to hear that my brother officer seemed a thousand times more embarrassed than my mistress.

I. Not at all. In that I clearly recognize the effrontery of the unmasked woman. It was very fortunate for you that chance prevented you from being a dupe any longer.

THE STRANGER. Exactly, unless the sorrows to which the certainty of being deceived exposes one are not more unpleasant than a deception of which one is ignorant. Either point of view has something to be said for it.

However that may be, this incident caused me the most bitter grief, which was increased by the

fact that I had to conceal it. Amongst the tumultuous feelings which racked me, the desire for revenge was one of the strongest. You know, perhaps, that in every provincial town there are three or four women who vie with one another for supremacy in beauty and success. Hatred is at the bottom of their various love affairs, and their sole occupation is to devise means of relieving each other of their conquests. To revenge myself on my faithless mistress, I decided to pay my addresses to her most hated rival. I carried out my project with the most immediate and gratifying success. I had been careful to conceal my distressing adventure: consequently, my new mistress, being unaware of my true motive, attributed my attentions to the power of her own charms. It was natural that she should be deceived. To the fancy she took for me was added the triumph of getting me away from her enemy: which were quite sufficient reasons for her not to make me sigh too long with unrequited love. So I passed from the arms of a treacherous woman into those of a lovely creature who adored me, and I had the satisfaction of witnessing the vexation of my first mistress and all the attempts she made to bring me once more beneath her spell. All her manœuvres were, however, in vain, though I was acutely aware of the fact that I still loved her.

I. So you were happy at last. I am so glad.

THE STRANGER. Far from it. I was loved; but I did not love; and the devotion of my new mistress seemed insipid to me. All the details, all the little anxieties which are so delightful for two people who are mutually in love, merely bored me. I began to reproach myself for ingratitude, and this only added to the awkwardness of my position. I wanted to try to get out of it and, shrinking as much from doing anything discourteous as from remaining any longer in the situation in which I was, I hit upon a plan which I thought would settle the whole matter and which I looked upon as infallible. One of my comrades was an exceptionally handsome man; to this advantage he added those of possessing a neat turn of wit and a gay and thoughtless character: in short, he had all the qualities necessary for the seduction of woman. I took this young man into my confidence and begged him to take my place. I had no difficulty in persuading him. He promised to relieve me of my mistress at once. In cases of this sort a man is always pretty sure of himself, but my friend was so confident, that from that moment I looked upon myself as having received my dismissal, and already felt that a weight had been lifted from my mind. Well, Blancourt, for that was my comrade's name, began to court her. His attentions became

so marked that every one noticed them, and imagined that, as is usual with husbands and recognized lovers, I was the only one to remain in ignorance. I gave him, as you may well believe, every possible opportunity. Yet I kept a careful eye on his progress. When I was present my mistress received him charmingly, and even had the wit to flirt with him; but Blancourt told me that when I was not there she was much less demonstrative, and that when they were alone together she was utterly indifferent to him. He calmed the anxiety this report caused me by assuring me that she could not hold out for long, and that, in any case, if she drove him to it he would employ certain tactics which were looked upon in the garrison as quite infallible. I believed him; but, seeing that he made no progress, I urged him to make use of his infallible tactics. A few evenings later he came to see me.

‘It is quite useless,’ he told me. ‘Ah, what a woman! I can scarcely believe what has just happened.’

‘You have failed!’ I cried. ‘Is it possible that I am destined to be loved eternally?’

‘Loved!’ echoed Blancourt. ‘Adored, you mean; and with the greatest adoration I have ever known in my life. Listen! With the object of settling the matter, I went to see Madame de — at nine o’clock, an hour when every one is

in his own apartments, and I could have an opportunity of acting without fear of interruption. I began to make her the most stirring and impassioned declaration. At first she treated the whole matter as a jest; then she began to implore me to leave her, in a voice that showed me that I was really annoying her exceedingly. Nettled by this reception and eager to attain my ends, I threw myself at her feet; I forcibly seized one of her hands, which I covered with kisses. I gradually became still more enterprising . . . No tigress could have shown such strength and such anger as she did at that moment. She struggled furiously from my arms and cried:

“You are insolent! I do not know what prevents me from calling to my lackeys to treat you as you deserve.”

She uttered these words so proudly that I was distinctly impressed by them. I was on my knees and I remained there; I do not quite know why.

“Sir,” she added very gravely, “your youth and your frivolity are your only excuses for forgetting yourself as you have done. Never have the effrontery to darken my door again. A little coquetry, perhaps, and a great many stories which feminine jealousy has invented about me, have apparently misled you about my character. Although by your conduct you have forfeited

any right to an explanation, I desire, nevertheless, that you should know something of my feelings. Let me tell you that I loathe and despise a coxcomb who is foolhardy enough to outrage them to the extent that you have done, and that in any case they are absorbed in a devotion which neither temptation nor time can ever destroy. If I have suffered your attentions, it is only because they fitted in with my plans. The lack of discretion with which you have treated me made it unnecessary for me to have any scruples in my treatment of you.”

‘So I am irretrievably lost,’ I said to Blancourt, sadly.

But you seem amused.

I. I am really very sorry; but how could I help it? You are making a great tragedy out of being adored by a charming woman who, it appears, fully deserved your devotion.

THE STRANGER. That is exactly what was torturing me. The more indebted to her I thought myself, the more I reproached myself for my indifference; and the greater effort I made to overcome that indifference, the less I succeeded. I experienced the drawbacks of all passions in which the degree of mutual tenderness is unequal, and in which, consequently, both parties are unhappy. For it is, perhaps, just as galling to be compelled to cherish a person out

of gratitude, as to have one's passionate caresses coldly returned.

I. It seems to me that you cannot see the comic side of even the most humorous situations.

THE STRANGER. That is not my fault. I see things from the point of view of every man who has lived and has reflected upon life.

I was condemned, therefore, as I have just told you, to continue seeing Madame de ——. I had to submit to my fate. I remained for some time in this quandary, and my patience was rapidly becoming exhausted, when a totally unexpected event solved my troubles for me. I received a letter in an entirely new tone from my father. He told me that my two elder brothers had died of smallpox within ten days of each other. He called me his *dear son* and *the only consolation left to him by Heaven*, and bade me come to him immediately.

I waited only long enough to take leave of my superior officers and to see my mistress once more. I must confess that her sorrow touched me when I said good-bye to her. I did everything I could to console her. However little one may be in love, one possesses a certain sensitiveness which, when aroused, may easily be mistaken for a much stronger emotion; and at this moment I certainly appeared to be much moved. This satisfied the desire I had to separate as kindly as

possible from a woman to whom I owed nothing if not respect.

My father received me as his only son. He had obtained for me the command of my eldest brother's regiment. When he told me the news I was overjoyed. I was strongly attached to the Service, and anything which procured me promotion could only be extremely pleasant to me. This feeling was by no means overshadowed by sorrow at the loss of my two brothers, whom, as an exile from my family, I hardly knew.

I will pass quickly over the period of mourning and sorrow in our household, to come to the time when my father wished me to marry. He was thoroughly alarmed by the fate of my brothers, and, eager though I was to join my regiment, he would not consent to let me start before I had taken a wife. Although he was extremely wealthy, the upsetting of his plans had tied up his lands in such a way that a considerable sum of money was required to free them. To find this he was compelled to marry me to money. I married the daughter of a Farmer-General, who brought me a great deal of wealth and a lot of distressing relations, who, however, were very soon forbidden my house. Behold me, then, provided with a very pretty, very frivolous wife, who was at first, as is usual in such cases, greatly attracted by me. I led a very happy, or, to be more accurate, a very

giddy life. As everything was new to me, I found everything absorbing, and could not make up my mind what to like best. The first weeks of a rich marriage are always delicious. Lavishness in everything attracts a crowd of pleasure-loving people, as long as it lasts. I made a thousand acquaintances, from whom I chose those I liked best as my friends. Amongst these, a man named Darcenville made more impression on me than any of the others. He was cultured, witty, gay, and well-mannered; his only defect was an exaggerated ambition.

I. Ah! You were, at any rate, happy then.

THE STRANGER. We are always happy when we are borne along in the whirl of life and when, without dwelling upon the future or on our surroundings, we are occupied solely by the distractions of the moment. But how long in the lifetime of man do such periods last? A moment, which even then seems to be granted to us only in order to emphasize the emptiness which follows it.

Although the life I led was very delightful, I chafed continuously with the desire to join my regiment. At last the time came when duty compelled me to go. When I left, my wife informed me that she was pregnant. She shed a few tears at our separation; I shed none, for I was glad enough to go, since I was not in love with her.

My regiment was stationed at Besançon. I was received by the men with every mark of satisfaction. The first days were passed in pleasure and feasting; but out of these amenities there soon arose disputes, because of the lack of order I found everywhere. I saw that my brother had neglected discipline; I tried to re-establish it, and I met with the resistance which general slovenliness always opposes to reform. I was firm and gave punishments. I succeeded in so far as my object was concerned; but the care and trouble I had to take confirmed me all the more in a truth which I had already recognized: namely, that the more authority a man has over others, the more enslaved to them does he become if he tries to do his duty. Besides, although I was delivered from the authority of the incompetent superiors who had so pestered me, I fell beneath another and much more unbearable yoke, namely, that of the despotism of the Minister who, jealous of his rights, or influenced in his attitude by some corrupt underling, is nearly always opposed to the suggestions that any hard-working colonel may make for the good of his regiment. I had to submit to these mortifications, and as the main object of my life was to fulfil the duties of my calling conscientiously, nothing could turn me from my purpose.

My regiment did not occupy so much of my

time that none was left me for distractions. The social life of Besançon was pleasant and varied. Amongst the women to whose houses I was taken there was one to whom I did not at first do the full justice she deserved. A sweet, shy manner set off her natural attractions and gave one a suggestion of her modest, straightforward character. Her judgement was clear but a little too reserved, sometimes showing a little too clearly the effects of the education usually given to women, which makes them cling to certain prejudices as virtues, anything not conforming to them being anathema. She was not exempt from the vanities of her sex and could be coquettish without any loss of modesty; and this modesty on her part was more the result of her natural inclination than of any fear of public disapproval. She was, however, far from being indifferent to criticism, and the attempts occasionally made by calumny to tarnish her reputation caused her so much pain that it took a long time for her to recover from them. A stern critic of her own actions, her imagination invariably magnified her fancied wrongs. At the same time she defended others so generously, that those who did not know her intimately attributed to affectation what really arose from her gentleness and kindness. In addition, she was extremely just and forbearing, and needed some object to occupy her naturally affectionate heart.

Such was Madame de Rennon. When I first met her she loved her husband, a sentiment which, although it is a source of true happiness, does not fit in with daily life, since it irks the liberty in which the charm of present-day Society consists. The reserve and modesty upon which every husband insists in his wife restricts enjoyment: even the gaiety of others is affected by the eternal presence which a loving husband inflicts on the houses frequented by a wife who loves him. In self-defence, Society, frivolous and corrupt, ridicules this sympathy between husband and wife.

Madame de Rennon's attitude towards her husband shocked me; I made one or two trenchant remarks about it which were repeated until they came to her ears; this, of course, hardly prejudiced her in my favour. However, I saw her nearly every day, and gradually my presence impressed itself upon her. I did not know her character well enough to give it its due; but, feeling myself daily drawn more and more towards her, I altered my tone and began to take as much pains to please her as I had formerly put little restraint upon my wit. She was, as she afterwards admitted, charmed to see this change in me. Not that she felt any attraction towards me, but because it flattered her to feel that she would soon have at her feet a man who had flouted her to the extent of scoffing at her, when she would be able

to scoff at him in her turn. Love assumes all sorts of disguises to insinuate himself into people's hearts, and in this case he took the form of vengeance. Madame de Rennon did not recognize him in this guise until it was too late to resist him. With her usual candour and simplicity, she confessed my victory to me as soon as she became aware of it, relying upon the strength of her prejudices to preserve her from any consequences. And indeed, although on this occasion my duty only compelled me to stay with my regiment for three months, I remained with it for nine months, during which I vainly employed every artifice that the most passionate love could conceive, in the effort to seduce her. I could make no progress at all. Madame de Rennon gratefully accepted the proofs of my attachment and showed the greatest interest in me; but that was all.

At last I had to leave her to return to Paris. I received word that my wife had given birth to a boy. My parting with Madame de Rennon was a touching one, for we loved one another truly. She promised to write to me often. The certainty of receiving letters from her helped to console me for the thought that I was going far away from her.

My wife did not receive me, on my return, in the way which her emotion at my departure had led me to expect. She seemed to be rather ill at

ease, and reproved me for not having sent a messenger to warn her of my arrival. The sudden sight of me, she declared, had given her a shock from which she would not easily recover. I answered her outburst gently, but I did not succeed in calming her. I detected the same bitterness in everything she said to me. I begged her to give orders that no one was to be admitted, so that I might devote the remainder of the day to rest, and to the pleasure of her company. Her reply was that if I wanted to be alone I had only to shut myself in my own room, where no one would come to disturb me, and that, for her part, she was only just getting about again, and had several people coming to supper. I was amazed at all this, and it did not take me long to suspect the cause of this sudden change in my wife.

Amongst the company that evening there was one very handsome young man. My wife coloured as she introduced him to me, and the remainder of the guests bit their lips. This was quite sufficient to open my eyes, but I pretended to notice nothing. The supper-party passed off gaily enough, but, although no one paid much attention to me, I was conscious that my presence was irksome. The following morning my father sent for me in his room.

‘My son,’ he said to me, ‘I have no intention of attacking your wife’s conduct, nor even of

suspecting it; but she has collected around her people of whom I utterly disapprove and who lead her into much too dissipated a life, which is not a good thing for any woman, above all for a woman of her age. My duty is to warn you, yours to set the matter right.'

In reply to my father I said everything I could think of to dispel the suspicions of which I was myself only too thoroughly convinced. For it is another of the absurdities of the role of husband that he is obliged to take his wife's part, whether she be right or wrong. I promised to speak to mine, and I assured him that she would undoubtedly do anything she could to please him. Accordingly, I had a serious conversation with her, a conversation which was more than once interrupted by her temper, which she vented mainly on myself. It was natural, she said, that the irritation of old age should prejudice my father, but it was early days for me to become crotchety. However, she quite recognized that slavery was the necessary lot of woman, and she might even have been obliging enough to fall in with my whims, had it been a question of anything but of sacrificing her friends, a weakness to which she would never yield so long as she lived.

I was very disconcerted by this, not for any personal reason, for, to be quite frank with you,

my wife's actions affected me very little. But my father's violent and tyrannical temper made me fear lest the disregard with which his orders were being treated might produce an explosion of wrath. Nor was I mistaken. Seeing that things went on just as before, he demanded an explanation from me. I could only give him unsatisfactory answers: I had no others to give. He flew into a violent rage, and ended by telling me to leave him, saying he was not going to have himself to reproach for tolerating such things in his house, and that when I was in my own, since he would no longer be sharing the ridicule with which I was covering myself, he would be the first to scoff at me.

I. I recognize the intolerance of the aged. They always seem to efface the memory of the situations in which they found themselves in their youth, and to forget how unjust they then thought the severity of those upon whom they were dependent.

THE STRANGER. It comes from pride and from the desire to dominate. So long as our strength permits us to yield to our passions, the success they bring us is sufficient to enable us to play our part in Society, and to give us a sort of pre-eminence there. But when the icy hand of age has destroyed in us what gave us our position in that Society, we still want to cling to it and

even to be necessary to it. Then it is that prejudices, so inimical to the fires of passion, so well adapted to old age, so dominant over the mind of man, however great the effort he makes to be free of them, replace what we have lost. The importance which one appears to attach to them is the only claim one can still have to consideration. Add to this the sorrows of privation and the jealousy which the virility of others inspires, and you will find the keynote of the ill-humour and harshness of old people. They say that each age has its distraction. This is theirs.

The tone which my father adopted put me into the most awkward predicament. I knew how unbending his character was, and I knew quite well that I could do nothing to alter my wife's attitude: I felt that to leave them together any longer was to lay myself open to scenes which tyranny on the one side and stubbornness on the other could hardly fail to produce. On the other hand, to leave my father was to create a rupture from which I shrank. I had, however, to do one or the other, I could not decide which. In this perplexity I decided to call Darcenville to my aid. I confided my predicament to him and asked his advice.

'Your position is an awkward one,' he said; 'but you should not hesitate a moment: you should leave your father's house. Malicious gossip could

only put you in the wrong; whereas, if you side with him against your wife, you will inevitably be forced into behaviour that will make you ridiculous. Chance, our own stupidity, or feminine cunning has made of a woman's reputation a matter which affects us personally, and to an extent which is all the more annoying, because the point upon which it depends is merely a misfortune, and as such is very susceptible to ridicule. It is only the consequences of this that may become serious. But, apart from the fact that the public rarely enters into these calculations, when it censors it never has the vindication of morality in view. Its only motive is malice. So that the husband who attracts its notice must expect to become the object of its sneers; for from whatever point of view you look at the matter, the main one, as I have already told you, is always one of ridicule. This first consideration excludes any other sensible ones.'

I. This Darcenville seems to have been a very level-headed young man.

THE STRANGER. I thought as you do, and I followed his advice. I left my father and I suffered the vexation, after choosing the course which seemed to me to be the wiser, of being universally execrated.

I. Yes, that is another of the pleasant things in life, that one is always judged without any

knowledge of the circumstances, and often, even if they are known, without any attention being paid to them.

THE STRANGER. Having got rid of the discomfort of being a buffer between my father and my wife, I found myself in another predicament—that of being a deceived husband. It was not as though I was personally affected; but I found myself compelled to pretend that I was, which is more difficult than at first sight appears. Should a husband take it upon himself to forbid the lover to come and see his wife, he forces them both to meet in public places or clandestinely. The first course attracts every one's notice, and the second is always discovered; both give rise to endless gossip. If, wishing to be still more unpleasant, he persists in trying to spoil her opportunities and deprives her of them, he will certainly bring a storm about his head or, at the very least, suffer from his wife's bad temper and from quarrels which will make his house a hell for him. And often enough the only reward he gets for his pains is that the chosen lover is discarded for another. If, much kinder and certainly much wiser, he pretends to notice nothing, he is accused of stupidity, and in proportion as the care which his wife takes to hide her infidelities diminishes, so the ridiculousness of his situation is increased.

I realized all these objections, but I could see

no remedy to them. Once more I had recourse to my friend.

‘What is there to compel you to live with your wife?’ he asked me. ‘Are you aspiring to swell the number of existing happy marriages and, by bearing the torch of conjugal love from house to house, to cast a cloud over even your own, and to bore all your friends with your chaste passion until you merely become a laughing-stock to them?’

‘Follow the example that husbands used to set: they were never seen with their wives. Thus they learnt to add to the bonds of matrimony the pleasures of celibacy, never wearied other people with their presence together, and never furnished them with proofs of the treachery of its deception. Besides, the less one sees one another the more pleasant it is when one does meet, and the less danger is there of the irritation and quarrels to which the boredom of the common life, which each party wants to conduct according to his or her own fancy, necessarily leads.’

Again Darcenville was right; I took his advice and profited greatly by it. I avoided my wife’s friends. I was never at home when she gave supper-parties and, when it happened that I had something to say to her, I had myself announced as though I were a visitor. She always received me most kindly because, since I no longer exacted

anything from her, everything she granted me came from her own free will, and because, anxious to fill the role of a reputable woman and freed from the awkwardness of daily intercourse, she lent herself joyfully to those flamboyant interludes which are always so satisfying to a woman's vanity.

For my part, I took a little house, where I gave supper-parties to my own acquaintances. Nearly all my time was spent there, but I was no happier for that. Once I had escaped from the vexations of my own home I became a victim to the countless petty worries of social life. If I tried to please one woman I aroused the jealousy of others; if I had a successful love affair I attracted the jealousy of men. A thoughtless word, and I would be involved in a quarrel; an unkind word, and I had committed an atrocity. Other people's baseness was imputed to me. The services I rendered people were repaid with ingratitude. My serious attentions were treated lightly and my confidence was rewarded with indiscretions. My tastes were ridiculed, and my faults were magnified into crimes. I found nothing around me but injustice, falseness and jealousy, and Society became unbearable to me.

Even had I not been very much in love with Madame de Rennon, the difference between her character and that of the people who surrounded

me would have been enough to decide me. I received letters from her regularly, and this was the only real pleasure I had, even though it brought home to me still more poignantly the grief of being separated from her. The anxieties of the fresh arrangements which I had been compelled to make kept me in Paris longer than I had contemplated, but I took advantage of the first opportunity to return to Besançon. I was received there with marks of the utmost tenderness. Madame de Rennon seemed even dearer to me than when I had left her; I adored her, she really loved me. How could she persist for ever in refusing me what was yet lacking for my happiness? I managed to overcome her resistance. The only wish of mine that remained unfulfilled was that my happiness might last for ever.

I. This time, at least, you will admit that you were happy?

THE STRANGER. I was certainly happy in the possession of the object of all my desires and in the certainty that my feelings for Madame de Rennon were reciprocated. But in my very happiness itself I found a source of much anxiety and sorrow. I wanted to spend my whole life with Madame de Rennon, but her natural reserve prevented this. Sometimes she was frightened of the attitude of her circle, sometimes she feared for the loss of her reputation,

which she saw besmirched for ever. Sometimes her prejudices got the upper hand and threw her into a passion of remorse, out of which even the most tender love was powerless to lift her. The most insignificant circumstance alarmed her. The sudden entry of a lackey was enough to disturb her and to prevent me from delighting in her tenderness. In short, the slightest thing would thwart me of her; and to the privation of her caresses I had to add the idea, the horrible idea, that she only belonged to me because of some spell more powerful than her own will. If at the same time you bear in mind the relations which she was compelled to maintain with her husband, I think you will admit that my lot was perhaps not so happy as might at first sight appear.

I. Is there, then, no such thing as happiness?

THE STRANGER. Perfect happiness, no. By happiness we mean permanent delight; where can it possibly exist? The state of our own affairs depends on so many different circumstances that it is impossible for them to combine in such a way as to produce stability: hence privation, distress, and, as a consequence, unhappiness. If, by some strange chance, this longed-for state is not destroyed, then satiety and disgust soon take the place of vexations, and lead to the same result. What I say seems to depress you, sir. Try not to think about it, and it will not affect you.

I. You persuade me only too well. And, now that I think of it, I can call to mind several periods at which I thought I was happy; whereas you show me that I was really only more worried than ever.

THE STRANGER. Console yourself; if you are beginning to see the truth, and are becoming convinced that men, in changing their condition, are merely changing one sorrow for another, you will also realize that they have the pleasure of changing, for it is a pleasure. The first moments of any new sensation have a charm which compensates us in some sort for the discomforts of life, in spite of the picture I have drawn you and the worst side of which you have compelled me to show you.

Madame de Rennon's integrity and her affection for me gave me moments that made amends for all that she made me suffer at other times, and the delight of which made me forget for a time that they were but fleeting. I flattered myself that time and intimacy would triumph over her scruples. In short, I lived on hope, that blessing of Nature, the precious illusion of which sustains us at the very height of misfortune and, as man's inseparable companion, seems to enhance his successes and, at the same time, to mitigate his failures.

My love, together with the care of my

regiment, over which I took a great deal of trouble, filled my days.

I had been four months at Besançon without any news of my wife, when I received from her a letter full of friendliness. This solicitude on her part astonished me. However, as we had not quarrelled, I interpreted it as an attempt to keep up appearances with me, and I thought that she had perhaps imposed the task upon herself in recognition of the forbearing way in which I had treated her. A week later I received another letter, which surprised me even more. She gave me the most detailed account of all she was doing, and even spoke to me of my interests, which she declared to be suffering in my absence. She hinted at her suspicions of my steward's accounts, which she said she had investigated and had considered to be very unsatisfactory. This second letter was followed by a third in which my wife spoke to me again of my steward. She added that it was ridiculous for a man of my position to waste his life in a garrison town; that I was practically unknown at Court, that it was time I made friends there, and that if I wanted military preferment I was following entirely the wrong road to reach it.

I could not get over my surprise at so much interest in myself. I spoke to Madame de Rennon, and she, knowing the terms on which I was with

my wife, appeared uneasy about it: she saw in it a return of affection on my wife's part. Nevertheless, with her usual sweetness of nature, she tried to hide her true feelings from me, and even did her utmost to persuade me to return to Paris, telling me that I owed it to my wife as well as to my fortune. I realized the excellence of this advice, but I would never have followed it had I not received a last letter which told me that my father was on his death-bed. So I had to part from Madame de Rennon again, and the parting was all the more painful this time because I loved her more than ever. Make what speed I might I was unable to reach Paris in time. My father was already dead when I arrived. My wife received me with every mark of affection. Not long after I had stepped out of my coach, a messenger, booted and spurred, entered the room in which I was with her and handed her a letter. After reading it she took out her purse and gave it to him. Then, turning to me, she begged me to read the letter. I saw that it was from a man who seemed to possess a great deal of influence at Court. It was couched in terms somewhat as follows:

Allow me to congratulate you. Your husband, madam, has been given his father's governorship: he is most fortunate to have a wife like you; he owes

his success solely to your petition on his behalf. I trust you will be pleased with my efforts.

I confess that I was amazed by this news. I asked my wife to leave me alone, so that I might recover from the first shock of surprise. She passed into her study to compose a reply. I had too little love or respect for her not to be very annoyed that I should owe this advancement to her efforts. I admired the caprice of Fate which poisoned the favour by sending it to me from a source that could only be very unpleasant to me. However, being even obliged to deny myself this emotion, I taxed myself with ingratitude and injustice and with being unable to forget past wrongs in considering the affairs of the moment. I promised myself that if my heart shrank from an affection which I could not feel, at least my body would conceal its impulses. So, as soon as my wife had sent off her letter, I used every means in my power to convince her of my gratitude. She told me that, seeing that my father was very ill, she had carefully concealed the state of his health so that she might have time to warn the man from whom she had just heard, and that he might be able to take the necessary steps without arousing any suspicions; that he had been completely successful and that she regarded this occurrence as the greatest happiness that life could

give her. She accompanied her story with impulsive gestures of affection and even the most passionate caresses, thus leading me to believe that Madame de Rennon had not been mistaken. This really distressed me, for I could not bestow on my wife a love that was no longer mine to give. Besides, I felt a definite aversion from her, which I tried in vain to overcome during the few days I was in Paris. I had to go to Court. A man who has no business there but to render thanks finds a smile on every face and every door open to him. Although from the start I only saw the very best side of it, it all seemed very strange to me. The people whom I knew best seemed to me to think quite differently at Court and in Town; even their appearance seemed to change. I studied everything I saw very carefully, and drew entirely wrong conclusions, because I judged from appearances, and the great art of the courtier is completely to dissimulate his real feelings and motives. Cringing slaves to their reputation, no matter what position they may happen to occupy, proud and disdainful towards anyone who is of no use to them, their life is but a continual comedy, dangerous to those acting on the same stage, but contemptible to anyone who can see through them and escape their intrigues.

I remained at Court no longer than was necessary. I was eager to return to Paris, where I had

business to transact in connection with my father's death. I hoped to conclude it quickly, so that I might return to Besançon to Madame de Rennon, and get away from my wife, who wearied me more and more with her attentions. My first impulse of gratitude for the service she had rendered me had disappeared and had given place to thoughts of her past conduct. I kept Madame de Rennon informed of everything in my letters, and her replies were full of every counsel she could think of that might make me a little more courteous to my wife; she even went so far as to threaten to quarrel with me if I refused to do as she told me.

I had spent three months with creditors and business men without making any progress whatever, when Darcenville, the friend of whom I have already told you, came to see me one morning in my room. At first he spoke to me of my business affairs; then, bringing the conversation gradually round to the subject of my regiment, he told me that he was surprised that, having devoted so much care to its well-being, I had left it for so long; he added that he had received a letter from Besançon in which he was told that the effect of my absence was beginning to be felt.

I was all the more amazed at what he told me because, though I had heard very regularly from

my major, he never mentioned anything disquieting. I therefore begged Darcenville to be more explicit. He replied that he could not, as he had heard no details of any kind, and all that he had been told was that things were not going well. I replied that I had the affairs of my father too much at heart to abandon them before they were put in order.

‘But I thought you were in love!’ he exclaimed.

‘Of course I am,’ I said, ‘and I am sure that you would envy me, did you but know the object of my affections.’

‘You must have great faith in her to leave her for so long,’ he retorted. ‘You cannot have reached your present age without knowing that it is a dangerous game to play.’

For a moment I felt alarmed. But, quickly recovering myself, I reproached myself for having ventured to suspect Madame de Rennon, and I told Darcenville so.

When he left me I began to consider this conversation in a different light. The eagerness he had shown for me to leave Paris did not seem natural, particularly as he was quite aware of the importance of the reasons that kept me there. In trying to probe his motives, I began to think that he had taken a fancy to my wife, and that my presence embarrassed him. I accepted this idea

all the more willingly because it pleased me. I was very fond of Darcenville, and this would be a means of seeing him more often at my house. If he could dominate my wife, I was quite sure that he would manage her in the way that was most acceptable to me. I remembered that I had often surprised him alone with her, and that they had always seemed rather confused on these occasions.

It was not long, however, before I found that I had been mistaken.

A day or two after my conversation with Darcenville my wife sent for me. When I entered her apartment she gave orders for the doors to be closed and that we were to be left alone, and addressed me as follows:

‘You may remember, sir, that, united to one another, as the custom is, by arrangement, without even a bare acquaintanceship, our hearts were never fettered by the shackles we accepted without love. I am sure you are too fair-minded not to disregard prejudice, and not to weigh our mutual duties and our mutual wrongs in the same scales. I may tell you that I have preserved the truest friendship and the sincerest regard for you; it is not so very long since I gave you proofs of this. But I cannot claim any credit for an act that was wholly dictated by my own wishes. I do not want to prejudice you in my favour now, nor

to gain your sympathy by reminding you which of us first abandoned the other.

‘Our sex is subject to disadvantages to which your own is not exposed. You have only yourself to blame if I am compelled to-day to make you a confession which my condition renders necessary. I have neglected nothing to try to hide from you a mystery, the unveiling of which may cause you some pain; but you have constantly upset all my plans; I have even confided in your friend, so that he might attempt to distract your attention from an event which I would have shrouded in impenetrable darkness, if you had given me better assistance. All my efforts have failed, and the passage of time forces me to reveal my secret.

‘You understand now; the future rests with you. Do you want me to hide myself away and to give birth to a child that will not be yours? By doing this we risk exposing ourselves to the indiscretion of some confidant, thus making us both the object of general censure. Or shall I declare the condition I am in? Are you prepared to adopt a child of whom you are not the father, thus completely obscuring a situation in which many others before you have found themselves? Will you treat me more as a friend than as a husband, and help me in my terrible trouble, thus meriting a devotion as lasting as my gratitude?’

I was so surprised by all this and, above all, by

the calm assurance with which my wife spoke, that when she had finished it was some time before I broke the silence.

‘Madam,’ I said to her, ‘you see me amazed at your eloquence; but, as your arguments are more specious than convincing, I must ask you for a little time to consider matters.’

Whereupon I left her, and lost not a moment in sending for Darcenville.

‘I am no longer astonished,’ I exclaimed, as he entered my room, ‘at the eagerness with which you tried to make me leave Paris; my wife has just confessed everything. I need your help in deciding upon the alternatives offered to me by my wife, namely, either to adopt the fruit of her amours or to bury it in the obscurity it deserves. At the same time, do not have so bad an opinion of me as to believe that I have allowed myself to be persuaded by my wife’s moralizing, or that I can consent to give my son a brother or a sister who is unworthy of him.’

‘And pray, why not?’ asked Darcenville coolly. ‘Do you prefer to dishonour your son’s mother and to expose him in the future to a possible lawsuit which might ruin him? For, after all, the child is yours by law.’

‘Mine by law!’ I interrupted, furiously. ‘Must one obey the law when it is so unjust?’

‘Softly!’ Darcenville continued. ‘Do not fall

into the error of nearly all men, who only judge the law at the moment at which it thwarts them. That law prevents far more trouble than it causes. You see it in a moment of passion, but you must recollect that it is the result of careful thought, consultation and experience.'

'What!' I cried. 'Do you think I can control myself and calmly submit to it?'

'I say more than that,' he replied. 'I say that you must do so, and, as your friend, I insist upon it.'

'Very well, then,' I agreed; 'I leave myself entirely in your hands. You may go to my wife, if you will, and tell her the attitude you are forcing me to adopt.'

Actually, when he had left me, my reflections led me to believe that Darcenville was right. It will not surprise you that this last incident, coming on top of my estrangement from my wife, made her unbearable to me. People noticed this in even the most trifling matters, when chance or necessity brought us together. The world, knowing nothing of her misdeeds and knowing that I owed my governorship to her, reviled me for my conduct. Darcenville reported all the gossip to me, and told me that I was considered by every one to be ungrateful and unprincipled. I lost my temper with him. I reproached him for the course he had made me follow, a course which,

without lessening my miseries, exposed my reputation to attack. Whereupon he reasoned with me so sensibly that I was compelled to agree with him. To whatever excesses rage may lead us, sound common sense always forces us to surrender in the end.

Shortly afterwards I had to submit to an attack which was even more distressing, because I was forced to smother the rage that smouldered within me. A woman who was an intimate friend of my wife begged me to come to see her, and I complied. She had taken care that we should be alone. She introduced what she had to say by a long justification of her action, which she knew, she said, to be a rash one, as she knew me so little. She begged me to forgive her, in consideration of the friendship which occasioned it, and then, coming to the point, after the most exhaustive enumeration of my wife's rare qualities, she entered in detail into the obligations I had towards her; as you may well believe, my governorship played an important part in this. Then, coming down to my behaviour, she accused me of injustice, and declared that I must either amend my conduct or run the risk that my wife should heed the council of her friends, who were all convinced that it were better for her to endure a scandal than to continue to live with a man who made her unhappy.

Place yourself for a moment in my position and you will realize something of what I suffered. I had, however, the strength to control myself. I said what I could, and I am sure I said it very badly. But I did not commit myself to anything, which is really all that could be expected of me. I put an end to this disagreeable interview as soon as I possibly could, and when I left her I was firmly resolved to leave Paris, even at the risk of my affairs going to pieces.

The war which broke out at about that time compelled me to do as a duty what I was determined to do for my peace of mind. I received orders from the Minister to rejoin my regiment. I hastened to Besançon to confide in Madame de Rennon the troubles that filled my soul with bitterness. It was a great consolation to me to see the sincere interest she took in me. It was not the formal interest which every woman feels herself bound to exhibit in her lover's affairs, and which is distracted and effaced by the slightest thing. Madame de Rennon had my welfare constantly in mind. She turned every possible course of action for me over in her mind, without daring to approve of any. Hesitation, in a case of this sort, is always the sign of great affection. Her brain could hit upon no plan which did not involve great disadvantages, and she frequently lapsed into a state of melancholy from which I

was compelled to exert every means in my power to rouse her. In spite of so much affection I seemed to notice certain changes in her: she appeared to have moments of reserve with me which amazed me. Sometimes, abandoning herself to reverie, Madame de Rennon fixed her eyes on me, and I saw them fill with tears. I tried to discover the cause of this behaviour. She attributed it to the effect my sorrows had upon her; but she was too truthful by nature to pretend well, and I saw that she was deceiving me. I made vain attempts to read what was in her mind, and I had sorrowfully to leave for Germany, weighed down by the anxiety caused me by her silence, which I suspected of hiding some melancholy secret.

However greatly this idea distressed me, I was too fond of the Service not to be distracted by the excitement of finding myself at war. There it is that a man who wants to learn and to show his willingness fills his days in a way that seldom gives him time to be introspective. The new kind of life I led pleased me enormously; unfortunately, however, being by nature reflective, the illusion of novelty did not act upon me so powerfully as to prevent my trying to discover the hidden motives which actuated every one around me. In the army, as in any place where men are congregated, I found flattery, servility, jealousy,

treachery. I found the private soldier crushed beneath work and misery, always eager to abandon himself to a licence which frequently cost him his life and which always dragged in its wake ills which were reflected upon every one around him. I found the regimental officer a prey to uneasiness and the despotism of his superiors, from whom he could not escape except, at the risk of his own destruction and consequently that of the army, by disregarding necessary discipline. I found generals who could not agree with one another, who were jealous of each other's success, and experienced a malicious delight in each other's reverses and who, whilst all striving for the same end, were mutually trying to lead each other away from the path that led there. And at the head I found a Commander-in-Chief surrounded by people who, under pretence of helping him, plotted his downfall, by base flatterers who tore him to pieces in secret, or by bolder spirits who defied him, excusing themselves by declaring that they were acting for the public good. All-powerful in the army, the Commander-in-Chief is really nothing but a slave, who rarely owes his place to merit, but more often to a Minister, or a priest, or a mistress, or a flunkey at Court. Raised up by intrigue, only intrigue can keep him in his place; consequently he thinks of nothing else; his days are

but a tissue of uncertainties, tumults, and fears. That is the impression that the army gave me.

Nevertheless the life appealed to me: whether because of the prejudices of education or for some quite different reason, the taste for arms appears to dominate every man who is proud of his race and possesses a private fortune of his own.

Very little happened during the campaign. Madame de Rennon's tears were none the less passionate for that; her letters were blurred with them, and were filled with tokens of the deepest affection; but if that sentiment was expressed in her letters with every possible warmth, the sentiment of love seemed to diminish in them daily. I expressed my anxiety to her without being able to obtain any light on the matter. At last I received a letter which made too great an impression on me for me not still to have it in my mind:

It is ended. I am renouncing the happiness of my life. A force which I cannot resist tears me from your arms; I acknowledge defeat to the only Master who is more powerful than you, and against whom I have struggled too much for you to be able to tax me with lightness in the step I am taking. I am abandoning a world in which all is over for me: it seems nothing but one vast desert now that I am no longer there for you. My husband has given me permission to retire into the depths of the cloister,

where I shall spend my days in lamenting the errors into which you have drawn me. And, alas! I shall be only too happy if I manage to regret nothing but those errors. Good-bye. Forget me, or, rather, may Heaven cause the same ray of light to shine in your eyes with which it has struck me. Heaven has ordered me to flee from you, and what a heart it has given me for such a sacrifice!

This letter came on me like a thunderbolt. A score of times I was on the point of abandoning everything to hasten to Besançon. My soul was in the grip of the most violent emotions. I wrote Madame de Rennon a letter full of the tumult I was in. The post was not quick enough to bring me an answer, so I sent my body-servant, whom I felt I could trust, with orders to make all possible speed. I could hardly live through the time during which he was absent, and his return completely crushed me. He told me that, in spite of every effort, he had not succeeded in having my letter delivered to Madame de Rennon, who was in her convent and never received anyone but Monsieur de Rennon, who sometimes spoke to her through the grille. I did not believe this story, and flew into a rage with my servant, whom I ordered to go back immediately. His second journey was no more successful than his first, and all I gained from it was the appalling

certainty that I would have to renounce Madame de Rennon for ever. This idea cast me into terrible despair. I yearned for the end of the campaign. It arrived and, as soon as I decently could, I took the road to Besançon. There I found fresh sorrows. Madame de Rennon still persisted in rendering herself inaccessible, in spite of all the efforts I made to penetrate into her retreat. Places which constantly recalled to me the happiness I had lost added further wounds to those I already had. Plunged in the most profound sorrow, one idea only appealed to me, namely, that of following Madame de Rennon's example: she seemed to have wished it. Besides, to adopt her attitude of mind was in some sort to get nearer to her and to cling to her still. I had heard it said that God is sufficient to a religious man: my own heart was too ravaged for me not to try to heal it. I made inquiries as to who was Madame de Rennon's spiritual advisor. I visited him, and confided my purpose to him. I found him to be a narrow-minded fellow who spoke to me of the joys of Paradise and the flames of Hell. Being anxious to convince myself, I expressed certain doubts to him; but he was too ignorant to dispel them. Of my conversation, nothing remained but misery at seeing what sort of a man had taken Madame de Rennon away from me, and a more firm conviction than ever of the strength of

prejudices, which reassert their dominion at the slightest opportunity when they act upon an impressionable mind.

The fruitlessness of all my attempts to see Madame de Rennon and the lack of assistance to be got from her spiritual advisor made Besançon an impossible place for me to live in, and I left it as soon as I could. The memory of the change in Madame de Rennon, which will be a sorrow to me all my life, made me forget to tell you that my wife had given birth to a daughter whilst I was at war, and that complications had set in afterwards which had left her in a very weak state. On my return to Paris I found that her lungs had become affected. She only lived a short while longer, and her last moments were very bitter ones for me. She showed so much repentance and said such touching things to me, that I mourned her loss with real sincerity. The woman of whom I spoke to you before, who had inflicted such a disagreeable interview on me, with an impertinence which well became her, reproached me with my wife's death, attributing it to her troubles, to my avarice, to my cruelty in insisting on her having several children, notwithstanding the delicacy of her constitution. She made the same statements in Society, which drank them in eagerly, as it does anything that tends to blacken the character of one of its number.

So many troubles coming together plunged me into a state of melancholy and depression from which nothing could rouse me. Darcenville was the only man I wanted to see. He did everything he possibly could for me. In the course of our conversations I told him of the plan I had formed of embracing the religious state. Although such a line of action was entirely opposed to his own inclinations, he tried to rekindle this desire in me.

‘It would give you a new object in life,’ he said. ‘In the condition in which you are, you must seize on anything that could possibly distract you.’

He did more than this. He brought to my house one of the most famous priests of the time. This man bore no resemblance to the provincial confessor who, holding up the scales of justice, could show me nothing in them but divine punishments and rewards: he was a quiet man with an attractive personality, who studied my own case in order to discover the way to my heart, and who, profiting by the story of my woes, which he skilfully extracted from me, took advantage of them to detach me from the world which had caused them. By basing his arguments upon ethical truths, he gradually persuaded me of the necessity of a curb for the passions and, from this undoubted necessity, of a religion and consequently a creed. From that point, physics

metaphysics, and history all furnished him with proofs with which to convince me and to bring about a conversion which he seemed to take a personal pride in effecting. He succeeded and, thanks to his exertions, I joined the ranks of religion. In changing my point of view I had necessarily to change the company I kept; for a subconscious instinct makes us avoid those who differ from our ideas, as it attracts us to those who share them. My new spiritual advisor introduced me personally into the houses of several ladies of exemplary virtue, and advised me as to the men from whom I should choose my friends. I was careful to obey him implicitly. A spiritual advisor is absolute master: his authority is based on the bad opinion of ourselves with which he is clever enough to be able to inspire us, and on the help for which he leads us to hope from his counsel and from his interest in us.

Peace was made that winter, and this enabled me to devote myself entirely to the new life which I had embraced. My spiritual advisor had told me that in it I should find the peace of mind and the happiness towards which every one strives. I waited for it in vain from day to day, from hour to hour. The society of pious people is just as subject as any other to dissensions. The pride inspired by the belief that they are better than each other banishes all mutual toleration;

consequently scandal is always rife, though it is disguised in a way which only serves to make it more lamentable. It is fostered amongst them by the arrogance from which every pious person suffers, in thinking that having sacrificed his own life he can insist upon other people doing the same. As I was perfectly impartial myself, although very fervent, I was amazed at such pettiness of mind in people who seemed to be treading such a virtuous path. I was strict in my attendance at church, where, I must admit, I was more occupied in fighting distractions than in being impressed by the grandeur of the mysteries celebrated there. I forced myself to read an Office every day. I fasted so much that it began to affect my chest; and to honour God I lacerated and neglected His creation. If the thought of Madame de Rennon came into my mind I dismissed it. Having become ungrateful on principle, I imagined that I was committing a great crime in recalling to myself her tender friendship, her confidence in me, the help she had given me in my troubles. Our intimacy seemed to me to be stamped with the seal of iniquity. If I was unable to banish her memory, I would proceed to lay my sorrows at the foot of the altar; there I experienced the greatest torment of all, that of being unable to abandon oneself to one's sorrow.

I admit, however, that I was already becoming a victim of religious pride, and that my vanity was sometimes flattered by the torment I inflicted on myself and by the victories I imagined I had won over myself. I was in this state of mind when Darcenville informed me that Monsieur de Rennon was dead. In the first shock that this news gave me I could do nothing but exclaim, '*Ah, my friend!*' But he realized only too well what I meant by that.

'I understand,' he said. 'You are nourishing in your heart the hope that Heaven will no longer stand between you and your inclinations. I have already foreseen the effect that my news would have on you, and I am prepared to go immediately to Madame de Rennon to offer her your hand.'

My only reply was to embrace my friend. However, when I recovered from my first emotion, I asked:

'But why should I not go myself?'

'No,' he replied, 'you must not do that. It is possible that Madame de Rennon is unwilling to leave her retreat; in that case she will perhaps refuse to see you. But I, whom she has not the same reasons for fearing, could penetrate as far as her cell itself. You may rely on my friendship to persuade her.'

'Very well, then, go,' I told him. 'Remember that my life's happiness is at stake.'

Darcenville left me immediately, after promising me that he would write to me as soon as he had any news. I counted the moments until the time at which I calculated his first letter should be due. None came. Several days passed, but still there was no letter. My anxiety was becoming intolerable, when suddenly one morning Darcenville entered my room. I read my sentence in his eyes.

‘I am in despair,’ he said to me, ‘for I have accomplished nothing. At the mere mention of my name Madame de Rennon hastened to the grille. She pressed me with questions about you, hardly giving me time to answer. Encouraged by this, I lost no time in laying your proposal before her. At once all her vivacity disappeared, and her eyes filled with tears.

“Oh, that I should have to fight against this new temptation!” she cried. “You do not know what you ask of me. Alas! You know how eagerly my heart leaps to meet the bonds you hold out to it; but I have angered Heaven too much; my life cannot be long enough to expiate my crime, and it is only by consecrating the remainder of my days to God that I can hope to efface it. My decision is quite irrevocable. I shall use my liberty to bind myself still more firmly to this community.”

‘You may rest assured,’ continued Darcenville, ‘that I made every endeavour to break

down her resolve; I put forward many arguments, none of which in any way attacked her principles, but only fought against her penitential attitude. A heart enthralled by love defends itself but feebly when urged to surrender. I saw that Madame de Rennon was wavering, and I was beginning to congratulate myself when, to my amazement, she left me abruptly. I did my utmost to obtain another interview with her, but without success. So as to leave no stone unturned, I even appealed to the Abbess, who has the reputation of being a woman of the world. She entirely agreed with my views, but she was no more successful than I was. In the course of the conversation I had with her concerning Madame de Rennon, she told me that she was an example to the whole community by her piety, and an object of general interest by her gentleness and sorrow. I did not write to you,' concluded Darcenville, 'because I had none but distressing tidings which any time would be too soon to tell you.'

I. Well, you described Madame de Rennon to me as a woman of a yielding disposition, and yet she appears to me to have behaved with considerable firmness.

THE STRANGER. Do you not know the power of fanaticism? It can be compared, I think, with all violent passions, with this added degree

of force, that it is sanctioned by the prejudice that usually condemns the other impetuous desires with which Nature has endowed us, and acts as a brake on them. The more hesitating a person's mind is, the more firmly does fanaticism take possession of it; in the guise of principles it banishes all irresolution, an effect rarely produced by common sense, even in the most determined characters.

The news which Darcenville brought me plunged me into the most bitter grief, which soon degenerated into a sullen fury. Absorbed in my devotion and in my sorrow, I never left my house except to go to church and sometimes to Court, whither I was compelled to go by business connected with my regiment. I spent a considerable time in this miserable condition without anything being able to rouse me from it. A dispute which arose with a woman who owned a property adjoining one of my own compelled me to visit her to come to a settlement; her name was Madame de Mercour. The frankness and dignity with which she dealt with the matter attracted me to her strongly. I was obliged to go often to see her in order to bring the matter to a satisfactory and amicable conclusion. Each time I saw her I liked her more. Madame de Mercour was a woman of thirty-five. She had retained much of her charm, and her mind was endowed

with the most admirable qualities. In addition to having a very cheerful personality she possessed unusual clarity of vision and strength of character. She had been a widow for ten years, and led a quiet and happy life on her own property. She had formed around her a circle composed of a few intelligent and very charming people who were constantly in attendance upon her. She considered me to be a worthy addition to this circle, and begged me, when our business was concluded, not to put an end to my visits; I was only too glad to comply. Quite apart from the attraction which I already felt towards her, the people I met at her house were very sympathetic to me, and I soon found myself spending every evening there. At about this time I experienced one of those mortifications to which soldiers are so often exposed. I was passed over for promotion in favour of men who could boast neither my devotion to duty nor my service, but who were more popular at Court. I complained bitterly, and threatened to resign my commission. No notice whatever was taken of my complaints, and to my mortification I was compelled to add the humiliating idea of the small importance with which my protests were regarded. One evening when, full of my wrongs, I was recounting them woefully at Madame de Mercour's house, I exclaimed, addressing myself to a lawyer:

'You are a lucky man! In your profession you have nothing to fear from injustice.'

'You know very little of our calling,' he retorted, 'if you prefer it to your own. You have certain annoyances, I will admit; but how many compensations you have! Whereas nothing blunts the thorns with which our path is always strewn; for, after all, what is a magistrate's life? To labour for ever at stupid details or difficult problems; to pass one's life in the fear that something which one has omitted or neglected will unjustly cause one's downfall; to sacrifice one's tastes and one's time to work, in order to acquire the reputation of being a good judge, which merely leads to still more work without any hope of reward, or even of respect; for, after all, outside the Law Courts long hair only makes the man who wears it ridiculous. Such is a lawyer, a man almost discredited in Society, even though he is its arbiter.'

'I see nothing for it, then,' I observed, 'but to become a pretty woman!'

'I do not think you would be doing very well,' put in Madame de Mercour. 'I was one once; I say it without fear of contradiction. It was a stormy period of my life, and I do not think I want to have it over again. It is true that a woman is always flattered by success, and that it delights her to attract all the young men with

whom she comes into contact. But what an appalling object of jealousy she is to other women! She becomes the butt of their hatred and their abuse. Even men themselves, either annoyed at their advances being repelled, or out of fatuousness, or often only to please their mistresses, are the first to besmire the reputation of a young and pretty woman. She seems to be debarred from friendship. For her, every man is a lover and every woman a rival. Add to that, more often than not, a jealous husband, an unjust mother, a troublesome family, and having constantly to be on her guard. You must admit that this is too high a price to pay to be the success of a supper-party, a ball, or a rout; and such a woman is only too fortunate if she can avoid susceptibility and resist the attacks that are launched at her from all sides. For otherwise, her life becomes nothing but a tissue of privations, fears, anxieties, and restraints, quite apart from the fact that inconstancy and treachery are often the only reward for the purest and most tender affection.'

I. What is the best thing to be, then?

THE STRANGER. Never to have been born: that is the only way to avoid unhappiness.

The society of Madame de Mercour had considerably weakened my religious fervour. Nevertheless, as it had been sincere, I felt within me that species of internal reproach which one

experiences when one strays from the principles one has embraced. In my uncertainty, I had recourse to Madame de Mercour for guidance. The opinion I had of her probity and of her intelligence justified me in confiding in her. One day when we were alone together I asked her what she thought about religion, because I had never been able to grasp her attitude towards it.

‘You are asking me a question,’ she replied, ‘which I find it difficult to answer. What can we say on a point on which reason cannot help us, whose first precept is to believe blindly, and on which we are guided by men who are in no way our superiors and who, more often than not, are only distinguishable from the rest of mankind by their clothes? Everything around us leads us to the conviction that a Supreme Being exists; but what is His nature? Does He want to be worshipped or not? This Being has never revealed Himself except to certain privileged beings who have transmitted His will to us. Since communities of men have been in existence, in each one has been found the trace of a cult. Philosophers say that the reason for this is that men are conscious of their own weakness and seek from a Supernatural Being the help which they cannot find anywhere else. This reasoning does not satisfy me. I do not know why God put me into the world. If the flames of Hell exist, it is

perhaps in order that He might plunge me into them for all eternity. But, since He has foreseen that my transgressions would require this from His justice, why did He let me be born? Why is not Revelation spread over the whole world? Why did the Apostles only travel over a part of it? In a word, why is there not only one religion? I confess that, on the other hand, the fulfilment of the proscription of the Jews astounds me, and I see in it an argument to confound the keenest intelligence.

‘In all I have said to you I have confined myself to the Christian religion, because I feel that by the beauty of its morality it alone deserves that one should try to investigate it. One consideration which always perplexes me is the everlasting instinct which urges us to do what the law forbids. What can have been the object of the Creator in leaving us those passions which we are constantly compelled to resist, since He made the whole Universe with a single word? Why did He not make us perfect, since He wants us to be so? “Had He done so He would have deprived you of the means of acquiring merit,” the doctors of the Church reply; but this explanation, however strictly just it may be, cannot convince our common sense. So it is that in all religious systems there are two opposing fundamental principles, which are constantly at war with one another

and produce that compound of good and evil which seems so strange to us; but if this compound exists on earth, why is there no trace of it in the system of the Universe, where everything is subject to immutable laws which keep things in their appointed place?

‘In a word, sir,’ pursued Madame de Mercour, ‘religion is a dark night which reason cannot illumine and in which the intellect loses itself. Every wise man will agree that, though he cannot penetrate it, he should put its moral teaching into practice as much as possible; for its only object is the happiness of every one, and the duty of each one of us is to co-operate to that end as much as he is able.’

‘So much so, then,’ I observed, ‘that you think one ought to practise moral virtues without troubling oneself too much about religion?’

‘I do not say that,’ replied Madame de Mercour; ‘I only say that one must be virtuous before all things, and after that follow one’s own bent. Provided that the first condition upon which I insist is observed, all other conditions only have with me the weight of free and private opinions.’

I have only gone into all these details of my conversation with Madame de Mercour in order to give you an idea of her character. You will, I think, agree that it was of the kind to endear one to her. Although I did not feel for her the wild

passion of early love, she inspired me with feelings stronger than those of ordinary friendship. I felt a need of being near her, with the result that I hardly ever left her house. Under the influence of her words my religious fervour, which had of late steadily grown weaker, entirely disappeared, and I had no longer any thought save that of spending my life with Madame de Mercour and of pleasing her.

Just about that time my daughter, or rather my wife's daughter, died. You will quite understand that I was not much affected by this loss; but I was extremely anxious about my son, who was brought to death's door by the smallpox. Madame de Mercour showed me the greatest sympathy in my trouble. It was in expressing my gratitude to her that I revealed to her, for the first time, the nature of my feelings for her. She seemed delighted at having made such an impression upon me, and did not conceal from me the fact that she was not unresponsive. Overjoyed at finding her so well disposed towards me, I yielded completely to the attraction I felt for her. My trouble was by no means wasted. I thought that her own feelings for me had reached the point at which I could safely crave from her all that could yet be desired. It was a difficult step to take, however, for, although we had lived together in the greatest intimacy, our friendship

had always been on a very serious plane, from which it was difficult to depart. Several times I was on the verge of declaring myself, but I was always checked by a fear for which I would have found it difficult to account; but at length, by dint of rallying myself for my bashfulness, I plucked up the necessary courage. Madame de Mercour replied with a burst of laughter:

‘Really!’ she said to me, ‘from your embarrassment and your blushes you might be a boy fresh from school. Don’t be alarmed, I promise not to have you thrown out of the window!’

Then, seeing that the frivolous tone she adopted was adding to my discomfiture, she went on more seriously:

‘I must beg you not to refer again to a matter for which I have always felt the greatest repugnance; it is a great sorrow to me to be compelled to refuse you something which I see you so earnestly desire. You are no longer young enough, and I am no longer pretty enough for that to be the aim and bond of our intimacy. Let us be satisfied with unbounded tenderness for, and blind confidence in, one another. These two sentiments are strong enough to bind us together and make us happy.’

This rebuff sealed my lips and distressed me considerably. I knew Madame de Mercour, and I knew only too well that I could never persuade

her to change her mind. Nevertheless, I made several further attempts, none of which came to anything. She always pleaded her antipathy to the subject, and thus erected a perpetual barrier between us. She yielded to my wishes in everything save in this one matter only; and as is usually the case, all my desires centred round what was denied me, and the favours I did obtain could not compensate me for their unfulfilment; so that, in a different way, I was no happier with Madame de Mercour than with any of the other women with whom I had lived. When I saw that I made no impression upon her, I decided to offer her marriage, though even in marrying her I did not hope to get what I had failed to obtain as a favour. The only laws which Madame de Mercour recognized were those which she imposed upon herself; but I wanted to tie her to me by one bond more. I found her just as disinclined to become my wife as merely to become my mistress.

‘The position of women,’ she explained to me, ‘makes it necessary for them to take a master once in their lives; but when they are fortunate enough to regain their freedom, I cannot imagine what could persuade them to resume their ever irksome fetters. I am quite willing,’ she pursued, ‘to devote myself to your amusement and happiness; but, in order that you may appreciate

my devotion at its proper worth, it is necessary for you to think that you owe them to my inclinations and not to my duty. I am too fond of you to wish to lose the credit for this in your eyes, and my refusal is dictated by the interests of our mutual affection.'

I had many arguments to urge with Madame de Mercour, and although I used them all I made no headway. At last I had to resign myself to remaining her platonic lover, or, rather, the victim of her whims. I was really in love with her. Women are always sure of dominating us when they have inspired us with certain feelings.

My son was approaching the age when he would have to go out into the world. However promising a son's disposition may be, this is always an anxious moment for his father. Although the troubles of childhood are left behind, others take their place which are all the more disturbing because as a rule it is a young man's first steps that decide the remainder of his life. A tiresome and incessant watch has to be kept on all his actions. His tastes, his friends, his health, his fortune should be the object of his father's sole attention. He is for ever being vanquished by the violence of his passions, and in order to save him it is just as necessary to avoid the bleakness of the pedant as the familiarity of being too confiding. Madame de Mercour was of the greatest help to

me in this arduous task. Women have the gift of combining charm with common sense, so that their advice is heeded and loses much of its tedium. My son's character moulded itself in Madame de Mercour's hands; from her he acquired a taste for good society and an air of distinction, two essentials for a man of the world. As I destined him for the army, I shared the disappointment of all fathers who, to perpetuate their race, marry their children before they know what an obligation is, and what are the duties Society exacts from them. I married my son to a very rich and aristocratic damsel. The marriage met with universal approval. Birth and wealth are the only conventions to which one pays heed in such cases. Personality, either in the contracting parties or their families, never counts for anything in these arrangements.

Shortly after my son's wedding, war broke out. A great many promotions took place, amongst them my own. Scarcely flattered at seeing my name lost in such a long list, which some of the names actually dishonoured, I took my son with me. The campaign began with a siege which gave the enemy time to assemble and to try to raise it. Our generals decided to fight a battle in which Darcenville and I found ourselves in the same Division. Before us we had a wood. The general in command was killed, and

Darcenville rashly advanced on this wood with his regiment. A devastating fire broke out from it. Alarmed at my friend's danger I hastened to his support. More concerned about extricating him than about the tactical value of the move, I took the enemy in the flank and turned him. My attack was completely successful. This wood covered the enemy's left wing, which we drove in with the greatest ease once we had carried the wood by storm.

I was unable to follow up the advantage I had gained, owing to a musket shot through the thigh which stretched me on the battle-field at the far side of the wood. Hardly had I fallen, when I caught sight of Darcenville. He had surmounted all obstacles, and was pressing eagerly forward.

'Courage, my lad!' I cried out after him. 'You have only to complete the work which your danger and my friendship made me begin.'

'Ah, you are wounded!' he cried, hastening towards me. 'Is it dangerous?'

'No,' I answered him; 'it is nothing.'

When I said this a peculiar look came into his face.

'I am in despair,' he said to me, 'not to be able to remain with you, but my duty compels me to leave you.'

Although his speech was quite a natural one, the tone in which he uttered it sounded false to

me. I had received too many proofs of his friendship to suspect anything more than that his change of manner was due to the heat of the battle. As we remained the victors, I was soon removed from the field of battle. Many people I knew came to see me. I naturally expected Darcenville, but he did not appear. I became anxious lest something should have happened to him, and I made inquiries.

‘Oh!’ came the reply; ‘didn’t you know he has been sent to Court to bear the tidings of victory? It was the least that could be done for him. We owe the whole success of the day to the brilliant manœuvre he carried out.’

This statement amazed me. I was surprised at no mention being made about the part I had played. I held my peace. However, the following day the general came to see me. In his congratulations he spoke to me only of my wound, and said nothing about my conduct on the previous day. His silence on this point increased my surprise. I begged his staff to leave me alone with him. When they had left I asked him the reason for this omission of all mention of the part I had played, and of the way in which my regiment had behaved. From his replies I realized that Darcenville had put in a report of the action entirely to his own advantage, and that he had only mentioned me as a man who had come up to

support him and had, moreover, a very small share in the subsequent success, owing to his being wounded at the outset.

Although it was a terrible shock to me to find myself betrayed by the man whom I had respected most in the world, I gathered together what strength was left to me and gave the general a true account of the action. I was unable to convince him: he merely observed that, owing to the density of the wood it had been difficult for me to realize the full extent of the manœuvre; that, when the troops had debouched into the open in pursuit of the retreating enemy, Darcenville was in the van. He adhered to this statement and left me abruptly, refusing to hear any more of what I had to say. When I was alone I had plenty of time to realize the bitterness of my position. And yet I decided to say nothing, as I was quite unable to believe that Darcenville could have been guilty of such infamous conduct towards me. I was afraid of doing him an injustice, and I wanted to hear what he had to say before I condemned him.

I. But, sir, you do not mean to tell me that this man, of whom you have told me so much, really did a thing of this sort?

THE STRANGER. Alas! yes, sir. Profiting by my absence, he took the credit which was by right mine. Shamelessly, he took the reward

which was my due; he was promoted, as is usual when one is the bearer of tidings of this sort; and to complete the picture, I must tell you that he was my junior.

I. But what a horrible thing to do!

THE STRANGER. That is what men are like: there are very few who have no weak spot. Their virtue is a matter of pride rather than of principle, and they only allow their honour to influence them in matters of small importance; a dominant passion absorbs everything and reveals the human heart as it really is. How truly has Rousseau said:

The mask falls, the man remains,
And the hero fades away.

Darcenville was ambitious, and he sacrificed everything to ambition. He was not away for long, and when he returned he came to see me with a coolness that amazed me. His effrontery was too much for me, and I exploded. Far from seeming embarrassed by my reproaches, he pretended to be surprised at my claims and denied the facts. Bitterness soon crept into our conversation, which I cut short by telling him that I needed rest, and that I begged that he would not trouble himself to come and see me again.

There was now no longer any reason for me to remain silent. I summoned the officers of my

regiment and informed them of what had happened. As the matter concerned them as much as it did me, they were very indignant and excited about it. Darcenville's regiment also took the matter to heart for a similar reason, and many duels took place in consequence. This all created a great stir in the army, which was solidly on Darcenville's side. In order to reach his ambition, he had made himself useful to a large number of people; but I, because of the retired life I had always led, hardly knew a soul. For, in war as in Society, it is never the facts of the case, but the opinion of the majority that counts in the long run. Besides, my protest had been a tardy one, and this was very much against me. In the report which Darcenville had made at Court, he had been clever enough to attribute the whole success of the action to the tactics of the general, who, in return, took his side. He wrote about me to the Minister, from whom I received a very cold letter in which I was rebuked for my unfairness, and for the dissension I had sown between the two regiments. I was piqued, and wrote a spirited reply; this brought me a still sterner letter. The Minister informed me that but for my condition of health he would have sent me to a fortress.

From that moment I made up my mind to leave the army. In spite of all my troubles and

sorrows, my wound was making such good progress that I was soon well enough to be able to travel to Paris. As soon as I arrived, I sent in my papers, which were accepted. I should doubtless have felt regret at leaving the calling which had always attracted me, had I not recognized that, in order to make any headway, it is more important to find protectors than to distinguish oneself by serving with bravery and intelligence, and I could not bring myself to do this. Madame de Mercour was keenly interested in all that had happened to me. But, as it was her nature always to take a strong line, she spoke to me more as a philosopher than as a sympathetic friend. She told me that what had happened was only one of those set-backs which abound in human society; that it should be a lesson to me to be self-sufficient, to know how to brave the censure of others whenever I had nothing with which to reproach myself; to seek in the depths of my heart the calm which I would never find amongst the vice and passion that rule the world. She was quite right. I felt this, and was beginning to view my situation with indifference when I was struck down by a new and very bitter blow.

I think I told you that I loved my son with extreme tenderness, which was justified by his own qualities and by the affection he had for me. In the arrangements made for his marriage it had

been decided that he should live with his wife's family. He fell so deeply in love with his wife that he hardly ever left her side. To my great regret I only saw him at long intervals; but, knowing that the first heat of passion soon dies down, I persuaded myself that this was but a passing phase; in this I was mistaken. My son's wife, besides being very attractive, was also very devout: a sufficient reason for her to tyrannize in her home. A devout woman is irreproachable on the sole point in which she considers her duty to her husband to lie, and consequently she neglects the little attentions and sacrifices with which a deceitful woman often compensates her husband. Proud of being beyond reproach she becomes despotic, domineers over him, and frequently makes him more miserable than if she were unfaithful to him. Except that she did not make him miserable, that was my son's position. The yoke is never very heavy when one is in love. He submitted to it happily; but, entirely in his wife's hands, he followed too closely the path of self-interest which she pointed out to him. In arranging his marriage settlement I had made over to him a considerable portion of my own property and had kept, without insisting on exchanging it for another, a property which came to me from my wife. I was very fond of this particular property, and I did not dream,

considering the jointure I made him, that my son would ever ask it back from me. I was, then, extremely astonished when, one day, after a great deal of hesitation which betrayed his embarrassment, he asked me to give it back to him. Although I was extremely annoyed at this request, I kept sufficient control over myself to point out to him the unfairness of his demand. I told him frankly that I knew quite well that the idea did not come from him, but from his wife's avarice. I tried to find excuses for him, and when he left me he was rather ashamed of his behaviour and promised to reconsider the matter. I cannot, therefore, describe my feelings to you when, two days later, I received a judicial order to restore the property. I flew into the most violent rage, and immediately went to see Madame de Mercour, to tell her what had happened to me. She asked me, drily, what I intended to do.

'I shall fight the claim,' I replied; 'I shall disinherit my son and never see him again.'

'That is precisely what you must *not* do,' she retorted. 'Quite apart from the fact that one should never bring actions against one's own children, the property belongs to your son, and you must return it to him. As to disinheriting him, remember that this is the harshest thing a father can do, so give yourself time to think. At this moment you are furious; wait until your son

comes to himself again and rids himself of the domination of his wife. He deserves, however, that you should forbid him your door.'

Madame de Mercour was a goddess in my eyes, and I followed the advice she gave me, without my son being in the least concerned about it. I was so wretched myself that even time did not bring its usual relief. There was no kind of distraction that Madame de Mercour did not devise to lift me out of the state of depression in which I was. In the course of conversation she reminded me of the philosophic principles she had expounded to me with such good results when I left the Service. But this time it was my heart, not my pride, that was wounded, and it could only be healed by some fresh charm. Madame de Mercour was too clever not to feel this, and she gave me the greatest proof of affection that it was possible for her to give, when you consider her personal prejudices.

'I have tried in vain,' she told me, 'every possible means of easing your sorrow. Your unlucky star has compelled you to abandon a career which you loved. You had a son whom you cherished, and who has failed you miserably; I alone am left to you, and I have decided to spend the remainder of my life in an endeavour to take the place of all you have lost. You asked me for my hand in marriage, and I refused as long as I

thought you could be happy without it. But I am too fond of you not to offer it to you at this moment when I feel that it might give you quiet and happiness. I know how attached you are to me; this bond will bring new joy to your heart and will, I hope, ease it from the sorrow beneath which it is bowed.'

Although I was deeply touched by Madame de Mercour's words, I refused to take advantage of the sacrifice she proposed to make for me.

'No, madam,' I said to her. 'I cannot accept your generous offer. I know how you shrink from the idea of marriage; I should always feel that I was unworthy of your affection if I did not resist this temptation.'

'You do not understand me,' she went on. 'I have always allowed frankness and the inclinations of my heart to rule the conduct of my life. It would cost me much more to see you constantly unhappy than to lose my liberty. Whether it be that I am moved to compassion by your misery, or whether I love you more than I did, the bonds of marriage no longer frighten me. That is the real state of my mind.'

I was too happy at this change of attitude on the part of Madame de Mercour for it to be hard for her to convince me. I yielded and married her, but without any of that pomp and circumstance which are always embarrassing for the

principals and wearying to the witnesses. At the foot of the altar and in the presence of two common friends we renewed the vows we had made to one another a thousand times, and which had been all the more earnest and sincere because our reciprocal happiness depended on this constancy. Madame de Mercour was not mistaken. The possession of a woman whom I had so much cause to respect very soon effaced the sorrow to which I had abandoned myself. I even had the satisfaction of knowing that my daughter-in-law was distracted over my marriage, fearing that the arrival of other children might deprive her of property which was still large enough to be considerable.

However, the first excitement of married life, in which the mutual desire to please always makes for self-sacrifice, soon dies down, and one's own selfish desires begin to be more important than the happiness of the person one loves: in other words, one's individuality begins to reassert itself. Hence arise dissensions, serious or trivial according to the circumstances, but all tending towards the same end. They are only pin-pricks, but they go on all the time. These are, however, troubles inseparable from any and every situation. Fate, which has never stopped persecuting me, had still greater trials in store for me; nor were they long in making themselves felt.

Madame de Mercour, or, rather, my wife, in order to increase her income, had invested all her fortune in an annuity, thus following the system of a century which has repudiated the respect our fathers had for their ancestral possessions, so that we now regard the wealth we enjoy as a gift of Fortune of which we are at liberty to dispose if we have no children. But the mistake she made was to put everything into the hands of a well-known financier whose credit was considered to be perfectly sound, but who failed on the morrow of a magnificent banquet. This was a stunning blow for my wife. In vain I pointed out to her that my income was large enough for both of us; that we should not have to alter our way of living in the least, and that she must thenceforth rely on me to provide for her comfort in the event of my death. From her replies, which were affectionate enough, I realized that the thought of having to depend upon me for everything was intolerable to her. And indeed, although she loved me very dearly, it naturally made her anxious. There is no sentiment so strong that it does not yield to the craving for liberty which lurks at the bottom of every one's heart; and nothing is so conducive to slavery as to be deprived of one's fortune, since by it we secure everything we want for ourselves, despotically, without being compelled to make all those efforts with

which grateful poverty repays the benefits conferred upon it.

I devoted all my time to distracting my wife's mind from anything which might remind her of her position. Not only did I take care that she lacked nothing, but I surrounded her with every superfluous luxury she could imagine. She accepted all my gifts with gratitude and affection, but with an undercurrent of melancholy which destroyed the pleasure of bestowing them. I was all the more hampered in my efforts to make her happy because I dared not try to alter her attitude of mind. In doing so I should have laid stress upon her dependent position and wounded her feelings; and I should have had to talk about things embarrassing to both of us, without any hope of being able to convince her. I began to be worn out by my wife's condition, without daring to show it; this brought friction and constraint into our relationship. Being prone by nature, as I have already told you, to reflection, and, indeed, to sad reflection, I came to the conclusion, from my experiences, that always to be near some one whom we like does not bring us happiness in life: it only adds to our own sorrows those of the person we love, without any chance of compensation by sharing his or her happiness, as the sum total of happiness can never compare with that of worries and misfortunes.

The more resolute a character is, the more is it cast down by any overwhelming sorrow. My wife was unable to bear up against the misery which weighed her down. She fell into a decline. Everything that could be done for her only seemed to hasten on her end. Feeling it to be near, she sent for me. The words she spoke to me will never fade from my memory.

‘It is all over,’ she told me; ‘I am reaching the end of my sorrows. They have been all the harder for me to bear because, knowing you as I do, I feel I have only myself to blame for them. Death does not dismay me, and you are the only thing I regret. But I confess to you that I am anxious as to what will become of me. The idea of the immortality of the soul flatters me by an instinct which I should find it hard to justify; but I am troubled by the uncertainty of its nature. If I have to start a new life, what will it be like?’

‘Shall I fetch De——?’ I asked her, mentioning the name of a very intelligent and famous spiritual director.

‘And what would he say to me if you did?’ returned my wife. ‘He would speak to me of Divine Justice, of contrition, of hope, and of commonplaces which would not convince me at all. I do not know whether I deserve any reward, but I am quite sure that I have not deserved eternal punishment.’

'Well, then,' I went on, 'would you rather speak to Monsieur de la Roche?'

This was a man who had known her since childhood, and was a wise and very profound philosopher.

'No,' she replied again; 'I respect Monsieur de la Roche, and I like his society; but he is a confirmed materialist, who mistakes tokens for proofs, and cloaks himself in more sincerity than possibly exists in the bottom of his heart. I do not want any man. The sight of man can never penetrate the mysteries I want to probe. But,' she added after a moment's silence, 'why try to lift a veil which is about to rise of its own accord? That is not how I should spend my last moments.' And, forcing herself to smile, she gazed at me with tenderness and affection. She gave me advice as to my future. 'You have always,' she said, 'been unhappy; let me take with me to the grave the consolation of believing that by following my advice you will brighten your life. Believe me, cease living for anyone but yourself; shun Society, which is a source of sorrows and misfortunes; above all, protect your heart from any attachment, whatever it may be, and you will avoid a great many sorrows. Banish the memory of me from your mind; do not torment yourself on behalf of one who will not hear you and who can no longer do anything for you. If, in spite of

yourself, the thought of me persists in returning, let my last words return with it: they contain truths which I beg that you will take to heart.'

My wife made a few arrangements for her servants. Then, feeling tired, she begged me to leave her alone. After this conversation, growing steadily weaker and weaker, she reached the fatal moment when I was forbidden her room. I asked no questions, dreading to hear the catastrophe of which I could no longer be in doubt. I shut myself up in my own room, and there I communed with my soul in a dreary reverie, passing all my miseries in review. I was not in despair, but I floundered in a quiet bitterness which was perhaps even more terrible. I spent several days in this state without even realizing that I existed. My wife's last words were constantly before my mind, and my first thoughts for the future took the form of a determination to follow her counsels. Having lost in her the only friend I had in the world, and abandoned by my son, who showed not the slightest concern on my behalf, I decided to retire to one of my properties, there to live in complete solitude.

The edge of even the bitterest sorrow becomes blunted as time comes between it and the source of its origin: mine was no exception to this rule. Although I was still affected by the memory of my misfortunes, nevertheless I began to feel

periods of loneliness. I decided to try to fill them with study. I chose, as my subject, History, as being less irksome and more capable of amusing me than any other. I soon grew tired of this when I found that most of the more interesting events were proved by critics never to have taken place. So I took up Physics: I found curious phenomena in this; but, as I found effects without principles, I soon abandoned it. Natural History seemed to me nothing but a series of long names. Metaphysics did not distract me for long: I lost myself in obscure deductions arising from vague hypotheses. Geometry, whilst satisfying my mind, consumed my faculties. Ethics, revealing to me the heart of man, merely reminded me of my own misfortunes. The choice I had necessarily to make amongst philosophical books was too much dictated by prejudice; in a word, I did not find what I had hoped for in study.

I tried to find in hobbies what I had failed to find in work. I collected dogs, pictures, china, in fact all those pleasantly or strangely useless things which so many people find so fascinating, but which to me were merely the source of further tribulation. A fall I had in the hunting-field decided me on the spur of the moment to get rid of my stable. I also abandoned shooting, after the misfortune I had of blinding my dog, which was

hidden from me by a bush. The fame of my collection of pictures brought several experts to see it: I had the mortification of hearing the majority of those which I valued most condemned as being merely copies, and of being considered by the experts to be an ignorant dupe. Only one picture met with their approval, but a clumsy servant, in moving it, by my orders, to another place, let it fall on a ladder and split it from top to bottom, so badly that it was beyond repair. I still had my china, but one night part of the panelling of the room in which I had arranged it fell down and reduced it to shards.

I. You seem to have been born beneath a very unlucky star.

THE STRANGER. Yes, I hardly think that such an appalling combination of misfortunes is often found in the life of a single man. But, after all, sir, all I have done is to experience the misfortunes peculiar to the different careers I have embraced, and thus to succumb to the dangers to which every one is exposed. Nature has, in giving us reason, wisely endowed us with passions to silence its voice and, above all, hope which nothing can destroy, and without which no man who reached an understanding of things would go on living.

I. Has that thought ever tempted you?

THE STRANGER. Forgive me, but, either

from instinct or from weakness, after once making the resolve, I always put off its execution until the morrow. I hate the society of men—but I have never been afraid to face them, because I have never done anything I am ashamed of them knowing—and I grew so early accustomed to the blows of Fate that they soon ceased to make me despair. These are the only two reasons that make a man kill himself.

Seeing that I could not be happy myself, I tried to create happiness for others. I saw on my own property the persecutions which unfortunate farmers endure in the collection of the taxes to which the necessities and extravagances of the State have condemned them, and I endeavoured to protect and relieve them. From time to time I spoke in their favour to those domestic tyrants, those harsh and idle despots, to whom the increasing miseries of an unwieldy Society have delegated the authority of the Master, namely the lords-lieutenant, who proved to me the necessity of the cruel law, inseparable from any rule whatever, of the sacrifice of the interest of the individual to the general welfare. Compelled to admit the principle, I wished at least to follow the dictates of humanity; I paid my peasants' taxes to save them from having their property seized—a piece of cruelty which they seldom avoid—reserving the right of recouping myself

whenever a good harvest should make this possible. General gratitude marked the days following this action of mine, only to give way to bitter resentment when, at the end of the autumn, I insisted on payment from those who saw their labours bearing fruit, at the same time remitting the debts of others who had met with failure. The only result of this wise generosity on my part was to bring me undeserved sneers and to excite jealousy amongst my vassals. When I helped them in the same way during the second year, the result was a general idleness which compelled me to abandon them to their fate.

I was confirmed in this decision by a piece of spitefulness from them which revolted me. Not only did I make my peasants large advances but, in my eagerness to help them as much as possible when one of them possessed a poor piece of land, I would exchange it for a more fertile one, until such time as the money I spent upon my new acquisition had improved it. It is true that I insisted that those whom I helped thus should work hard to make the land profitable. Having one day bitterly reproached a lazy fellow who had not carried out his side of the bargain, I quoted to him the example of one of his comrades who, by his diligence, was just about to reap a rich harvest. And though you will hardly believe it, that night this man was wicked enough to lay

waste the crops that accused him of neglect. Having established his guilt, I had recourse to those horrible methods to which man's perversity has reduced him—to torture. I had the fellow put in the pillory. Far from realizing his crime he was merely embittered by his punishment; and, in order to avenge himself, he stole into my orchard and cut down two cherry trees of which I was extremely fond, because of the size and quality of the fruit which they bore me; after which the wretch left the neighbourhood.

The matter was of small importance in itself; but, as an unfortunate seeker into the heart of man, I had to bow to the evidence and abandon hope of finding a better nature in him, in whatever sphere I might search for it. This experiment of mine was not the only new sorrow I suffered. Love came once more to trouble the days which were no longer suited for it: love, which penetrates the coldest hearts and the darkest retreats, and whose illusive delights give us moments which seem to raise us above humanity, only to plunge us into abysses of misery and anxiety which its seductive empire still knows how to make us cherish and regret.

Catherine, my gardener's daughter, was the reef from which a long series of reflections and misfortunes was unable to preserve me. She was of the age at which the grace of youth adds still

further to the gifts of nature. Her appearance attracted me and made me want to know something of her character. The simplicity of her conversation touched my heart without my noticing it. For a long time I had been looking on her with a lover's eyes, whilst I imagined that I was only considering her with those of a philosopher. When I saw the snare, it was too late to draw back from it. In vain my reason warned me how little I could expect to please or to attract Catherine; passion showed me the authority I had over her, and illusion went to the point of flattering me that the lot for which I could destine this young girl would suffice to decide her inclination, if not from fancy, at any rate from gratitude. Just as if inclination followed any laws but its own! I blundered blindly on to the extent of misinterpreting the respect which Catherine showed for me, respect which was only the result of her position and mine. At no time in one's life does one lack presumption.

I was soon disillusioned. One evening I remained in my grounds until after dark and, strolling along, I heard sounds in the wood. I made my way towards them and, in the waning daylight, I saw a man running away, and at the same time I heard the leaves near me rustle. I hastened thither, and was in time to seize some one who was coming from behind a bush. Not

knowing whom I had caught, I asked several times without getting a reply. Being curious to find out, I dragged this unknown person into the first pathway. What were my feelings when I saw that it was Catherine! The most turbulent thoughts and the most distressing pictures came into my mind. I hardly had the strength to speak. In the meantime Catherine had flung herself at my feet and, trembling with fear, seemed to be awaiting her sentence. The sight of the person one loves in such distress always softens one. I raised her up and tried to comfort her.

‘Who is the man who ran away?’ I asked her.

Her only answer was a flood of tears, and I had the utmost difficulty in making her confess that it was Thomas, the son of one of my farmers who, it must be admitted, deserved both by his age and appearance to have an advantage over me.

‘But,’ I asked her, ‘what were you doing with Thomas at such an hour in the wood?’

‘Alas! sir,’ she replied, simply, ‘we love one another; and we should already have been married, only that my father will not consent because he says it would annoy you; he has even forbidden me to talk to Thomas, and that is why when we want to meet we come to this hiding-place.’

This answer was so touching in its simplicity that it disarmed me.

‘Run along,’ I said to her; ‘don’t say a word of what has happened to anyone. I will keep your secret too.’

Though age may blunt our capacity for pleasure, it leaves us all our capacity for feeling sorrow. I discovered this when Catherine left me. I followed her with my eyes, and never had she seemed so attractive to me. Love suggested to me a hundred ways of taking her from my rival; but cold hard reason made me abandon all such thoughts. It showed me that it was only natural for Catherine to prefer Thomas to me; that it would be useless for me to assert my authority, which would allow me to tyrannize over this young girl’s heart, but could never give me possession of it. Then, showing me my lined features in the mirror of truth, it added regret to all other emotions to which I was a prey. And in the end it urged me to conquer my own feelings and to unite these two lovers.

When we accept the sacrifices it exacts, our pride gives us a certain satisfaction which compensates us in some measure at first. I felt a great deal calmer when I had formed this resolution.

The next day I sent for Catherine’s father and Thomas’s. A marriage in the country is soon arranged, particularly when the lord of the manor undertakes to provide the dowry. I united Catherine to the man she loved, and I consoled

myself with the thought that I had made two people happy. But I was wrong.

Not only did I give the bride a dowry, but I also gave her everything she required to set up housekeeping. Shortly after their wedding, passing before their house one evening, I heard cries. I walked in, and the sight that met my eyes moved me to the depths of my soul. Catherine, her hair and clothes in disorder, and covered with blood, was making feeble efforts to defend herself from Thomas, whose mind was confused by drink. In the first flush of my rage I attacked Thomas. Afterwards I inquired as to the reason of the quarrel, and he seemed to be entirely in the wrong. It would have been difficult for Catherine to do wrong in my sight. I still loved her. The moment of triumph had passed; my pride had lost its claims, and my passion began to renew its own; and if I had prevailed over myself to control my violent instincts, I now suffered from a privation which filled my days with bitterness.

I hastened to leave a place which held nothing but sorrow for me; but my heart was too troubled for me not to yield to the most melancholy reflections.

'So,' I said to myself, 'there is no state in which unhappiness does not make its appearance in one shape or another. In a city, betrayal would have

made Catherine's tears flow; here, brutality does it. Since human society is the same everywhere, let us shun it, let us shun it for ever!

Of all the places that suggested themselves to me for avoiding men, Paris seemed the best in which to be left alone. The great number of people who live there and the different occupations that interest them make it possible for one to be unknown and unmolested, without experiencing the horrors of loneliness. I have been here for nearly two years, and you are the first man to whom I have spoken . . .

At this point in the Stranger's story the striking hour warned us that the gates of the Tuileries gardens were about to close. We were obliged to part. I asked him whether I could flatter myself that I should sometimes see him in the same place. He promised, but he did not keep his word. From that day I never saw him again; and no matter what inquiries I made, that was the last I ever heard of him.

End of SPLEEN

THE SOLDIER LOVERS

Written in camp at —— in 1742. This is a true story. The hero of the adventure became a Field-Marshal after conducting himself with distinction at the battle of Lawfeld.

THE SOLDIER LOVERS

I HAVE just had an adventure the pathos of which still fills me with emotion. You know that I watch over the interests of my nephew's regiment, as he is not yet old enough to command it. One of the officers of this regiment came to see me yesterday to report on a skirmish he had undertaken. In giving me details he told me that at the moment the firing started, on looking over his men, he caught sight of a girl of fifteen or sixteen, extremely beautiful, in spite of the rags with which she was covered; he tried to make her go away, but she insisted on remaining, declaring that she would a thousand times rather die than abandon La Roze, a very handsome soldier to whose side she clung.

'This incident made a great impression upon me,' added the officer, 'but I had urgent duties to carry out at the moment, which could not wait. They did not, however, prevent me from looking at this girl with a feeling of pity due to both her age and her charm. A few moments later La Roze fell, pierced through the body by a bullet, and I saw the girl, her eyes bathed in tears, lift him up and carry him away with the

utmost tenderness and superhuman courage. When we had repulsed the enemy, and I had a few moments to spare, I sent for a sergeant and asked him about her. He told me that her name was Julie, but more than that he did not know.'

This story filled me with curiosity. I charged the officer to try to probe the mystery and to report to me about it. He returned this morning to tell me that all his efforts were in vain, and that in spite of every persuasion, La Roze had preserved an obstinate silence, whereas from Julie he had got nothing but tears; they had, however, both expressed a wish to speak to me. The desire to learn what I was beginning to be very anxious to know, as well as my real eagerness to be of some use to them, made me follow this officer with alacrity. He discreetly allowed me to enter unaccompanied a kind of stable where I found La Roze lying on some straw, the pallor of death in his features, a fact which did not, however, prevent me from being struck by the openness of his countenance. Julie was kneeling beside him, supporting his head with one hand, whilst with the other she busied herself in making him comfortable. She stood up as I entered, and I confess I was amazed at her beauty. Even though weariness and sorrow had left their mark upon her freshness, they had given her

such a look of appeal that it was impossible not to be moved by it.

‘The reputation you enjoy, sir,’ said La Roze to me in a weak voice, ‘has decided me, in confiding my secret to you, to place in your care a trust which is a thousand times dearer to me than my life. In a short while I shall be separated for ever from the most perfect thing Nature has ever made. The outward beauty you see in her,’ he added, looking towards Julie, ‘is but a feeble reflection of the qualities lying hidden in the heart of this unfortunate girl. An unhappy love affair has brought us to this abyss. I should not complain were I the only sufferer; but it appals me to think of the fate henceforth reserved for my dear Julie.’

At this point his tears interrupted him for a while. When he recovered himself, he proceeded as follows:

‘My name is of sufficient importance for you to know who I am, when I impart it to you. I am the Marquis de ——. My father, who possesses vast estates, retired whilst yet a young man to a property which is but twenty leagues from here, because he was disgusted with the world and with the army, which he left out of pique for an injustice that was done to him. I am his only child, by a wife whom he loved dearly and who died in bringing me into the world. The

companionship of Comte de —— compensated him in some measure for this loss. United from childhood by the bonds of the most intimate friendship, almost similar circumstances later contributed to its consolidation. Comte de ——, as well as my father, was compelled to leave the Service by the enmity of the Minister, and lost his wife in the same way as did my father. She died shortly after my own mother, in giving birth to the unfortunate Julie whom you see here. The Comte, bowed down by sorrow, soon grew weary of the world and the duties it imposed. He resolved to abandon it, and chose as his refuge a property adjoining the one to which my father had already retired.

‘My father, delighted at the step upon which his old friend had decided, employed the most urgent entreaties to make him come to live with him. He persuaded him, and the Comte left Paris, bringing with him Julie, still in her cradle, and came to enjoy a free and quiet life in my father’s house. Hunting, the joys of country life, reading, and study filled the days of these two friends. When Julie and I reached the age at which we could understand them, they devoted themselves entirely to the care of our education. Far from hiding from us those things which are considered dangerous for tender youth, they showed us the working of human passions,

pointing out their attraction and their danger. In revealing them to us to their full extent they thought to give us arms with which to resist them. A fruitless task! All their care was unable to safeguard us from them. Since they destined us for each other they took no pains to oppose the mutual attraction they saw springing up between us. On the contrary, they tried to encourage it, and seemed to delight in the happiness of two young hearts that love one another and are able to admit it freely. They taught us how to taste the sweets of love with that delicacy in which their chief value lies. In their ardent desire to see us wedded to one another, they were merely awaiting the result of a lawsuit in which the Comte was engaged concerning his wife's estate, before tightening our bonds by an eternal knot, and satisfying my ambition to enter the Service.

'Three months ago the Comte, having won his lawsuit, and feeling justified in giving Julie to me, told me that my dearest wish would soon be granted. My joy was all the more keen because I saw that Julie shared my transports. And yet, with happiness almost within our grasp, at the last moment it eluded us. A disagreement arose between my father and the Comte concerning the settlement they were making for us. At first it was merely a difference of opinion; but this soon became embittered. They began to

abuse one another, and their grievances increased because each thought that he had the greater claim to the other's respect; so they fell out with one another entirely. Judge, then, my feelings, when my father summoned me to him and spoke as follows:

‘ “The Comte's attitude is such an outrageous one, after all the friendship which I have always shown him, that I never want to hear his name again. My son, you must abandon all thoughts of Julie; it may perhaps be hard for you to do this, but it is my wish. At your age one soon forgets an attachment of this sort. In order to make it easier for you, I have resolved to send you to Paris immediately. I will follow you later; but, in the meantime, you will stay with a friend of mine to whom I will recommend you.”

‘Overcome by this announcement, I remained motionless, and I was still in the same position long after my father, who had some business to attend to, had left me alone. My first thought was to see Julie. As I was about to enter her room, I heard some one speaking in a loud voice. I recognized it as her father's, and I caught these words:

‘ “My daughter, I share your sorrow; but, in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, I can take no other course.”

‘A movement which he made at this point

compelled me to retire hurriedly, for fear of being discovered; and without quite understanding the instinct which made me fear his presence, I went and hid myself in a place from which I could see everything. When I saw him leave his daughter's room I entered it. There I found Julie, her face wet with tears. I threw myself at her feet and covered her hands with kisses. We remained in this attitude for a long time without uttering a word. I was the first to break the silence.

““So this is the end, my dearest Julie!” I cried. “I must give you up! The tenderest love, the happiness, indeed, of our whole lives, have no influence upon our brutal parents, who quarrel over sordid matters which are more important to them than we are. What will become of me? What will become of you? In a single moment the happiness of all these years is destroyed, and we are plunged into everlasting sorrow.”

““You can see,” answered Julie, “from the state I am in, what my own feelings are. My life will be one long misery; it can never be happy, since I no longer belong to you. My father has just destroyed my last hope: he tells me that we are to go away to-morrow morning, and that I shall never see you again.”

“When I heard this, rage began to take the place of my despair.

“Never,” I declared to her, “shall I consent to such a cruel separation! And you, our unjust fathers, did you only beget us in order to tyrannize over us? There is a limit to your rights; our duty towards you ceases from the moment you overstep that limit. Are you brave enough, my darling, to follow the advice which my love and my sorrow give me? Let us flee from our unnatural fathers; let us, under less stormy skies, live for one another, and enjoy the happiness of adoring one another.”

Julie seemed afraid of the state in which she saw me and of the proposal I made to her. Her delicacy, her modesty, her principles, all fought against me. But what girl can resist a tenderly loved lover and the thought of losing him for ever? I triumphed over her scruples, and she promised to meet me at nightfall at one of the park gates. From that moment I busied myself solely with preparations for our flight. I was too agitated to reflect on the consequences: I was entirely preoccupied with the idea of possessing Julie. I took all the money I could lay hands on. I had a considerable sum at my disposal, because my father had charged me with the management of his house, and I also acted as his rent collector.

‘At nightfall, then, I went to the stables and took a horse. Julie was not at the meeting-place when I arrived there, but she did not keep me

waiting for long. When I saw her coming, an indescribable wave of relief came over me. I ran to meet her, and folded her in my arms. Then, terrified of being discovered, I hastened to mount my horse. I took her on my crupper, and together we left the place in which we had once been so happy, but which had now become so sad for us.

‘We pressed forward all night at a great pace. At dawn we found ourselves in a plain. As I did not know where we were, and as I was afraid of meeting some one who might recognize and betray us, I proposed to Julie that we should rest in a little wood near by, there to await darkness. She agreed to this, and alone with Nature we renewed our pledges and our transports.

‘If you have ever been in love,’ continued the Marquis de —, ‘you will appreciate the vivid joy of such moments. It is as difficult to recapture them as it is to efface them from one’s memory. The approach of night roused us from the spell under which we lay. We mounted our horse again and followed the first track we came across. Until then no reflection had troubled me. But now the necessity for definite action began to force itself upon my mind. This brought home to me all the difficulties and dangers to which we were exposed, and threw me into a state of anxious uncertainty. Julie noticed that I had

suddenly grown pensive, and asked me what the matter was. I tried in vain to hide from her the thoughts that were worrying me; I had to put the situation before her and to tell her the view I took of it.

‘ “The time to consider the drawbacks of the step we have taken was yesterday,” she replied: “to-day is too late. There is but one thing left for us to do, to meet with indomitable courage every difficulty we find in our path. Do not think that my firmness comes from blindness to the future. In the resolution which we have taken, I risk more than you do. You have yielded to the impetuous passion of a moment, and in the eyes of the world you have committed no more grievous fault. But I have sacrificed every prejudice, even to the natural modesty of my age and sex. I have betrayed my father; perhaps he will never forgive me. So that I have nothing in the world to rely upon but you. Had I suspected you of ever being capable of fickleness, I should certainly have remained mistress of my heart. But there are so many bitter examples of the inconstancy of man that I may be forgiven if I doubt your own. I do not want to insult you by doing so; on the contrary, the thought that I have sacrificed everything for you and depend entirely upon you, is a sweet one to me. So far from repenting of what I have done, I would do it again without

hesitation. You, on your side, should be as determined as I am, and you must prove to me that I am everything to you, as you are everything to me. We shall certainly have terrible burdens to bear, but it will be easy to do if we try mutually to lessen their weight upon each other.

“For a man like you the profession of arms is the only possible one. If the reasons we have to hide ourselves prevent you from occupying the position to which your birth and breeding entitle you, you must try to distinguish yourself in the position to which you find yourself reduced. Great men have begun by being common soldiers; it is by your own merits that you must endeavour to return to your father’s favour, and to make him ashamed of having been mercenary when he should have been kind-hearted. I shall never leave you, whatever happens. I shall share all your labours and your dangers. Far from complaining of my plight, I shall deem myself only too happy if it enables me never to lose sight of you for a single instant, and thus to enjoy a privilege denied to all other women.”

‘This speech of Julie’s,’ continued the Marquis de——, ‘affected me deeply. I could not conceal the admiration I felt for her spirit. Her courage revived my own, and I decided, upon the spot, to take the course she recommended, as being the only suitable one in the circumstances in which I

found myself. Besides, it entirely agreed with my own inclination. I went into the first village we encountered on our way, and ascertained the road to follow in order to come up with the army which was being recruited, and was, I knew, at no very great distance from where we were.

‘Julie and I put on peasant clothes, for fear of being betrayed by our own, and resumed our journey. After several hours we overtook a soldier belonging to the regiment of your nephew, Monsieur ——. After asking him to which regiment he belonged, I told him that I wanted to join it. He seemed delighted at my proposal, because of the reward he expected from Monsieur de ——, his Captain, for bringing him such a fine man (these were his own words). I followed him to the camp. My guide bade me wait a few moments outside a tent, into which Julie and I were shortly ushered. Monsieur de —— seemed surprised to see us; his advanced age, his expression, which clearly showed his goodness and kindness, inspired me with a kind of respect which at first overawed me. When I recovered myself, I told him that I wanted to become a soldier, that I thought myself lucky that chance should have led me to him, that I wanted no position or treatment other than that of a common soldier, and that the only favour I asked of him was that I might have a separate tent in which to live with my wife,

from whom her tender age and my affection made it impossible for me to be separated. Whilst I was speaking, Monsieur de —— kept looking from Julie to me and from me to Julie. From the questions he put to us I saw that he was trying to discover who we might be, and that he was by no means deceived by our clothes. But, as I refused to reply to his questions, he said:

“My children, I do not wish to drag from you a secret which only your confidence would permit me to share. Until I have won that confidence, you may set your minds at rest. I will do everything I can for you, and I will give you all the help that you can expect from the interest with which your age and your appearance inspire me. It is a fortunate thing for you that chance has given you into my charge. The beauty of your wife,” he pursued, “might have exposed you to many perils in a camp in which unbridled lust reigned. I shall be able to preserve you from this; fear nothing.”

‘He then sent for a sergeant; he gave him orders in accordance with his promises to us. From that moment we led a peaceful life. Monsieur de ——’s protection sheltered us from the perils of our position. In my eagerness to fulfil my duties, I began to enjoy a certain respect in the regiment. Every moment I had to myself was entirely devoted to Julie. Unswerving in her

constancy, she never faltered for an instant on any occasion. She often forestalled me in the labours which the poverty of our position made necessary for us. Her weakness and delicacy were fortified by her courage. In her happiness at living for me, no shadow of regret for all she had sacrificed ever troubled our relations. If, at times, I reproached myself for the state to which I had reduced her by putting to her too vividly the sufferings we should have undergone had we submitted to our fathers and allowed ourselves to be separated, she succeeded skilfully in convincing me that our lot, far from being a sorry one, should seem full of delight to us. She employed the same skill to try to prove to me how necessary it was that she should never leave me, even in moments of peril; she played upon my jealousy by pointing out the dangers to which I should be exposing her if I left camp without her. So much affection and virtue gave me for Julie a respect which, added to my great love for her, made me devote myself utterly to her. She was fully aware of this, and repaid me with the tenderest gratitude. Our days were passed in happiness, our mutual love consoling us for all that we had lost. But, when Fate pursues people with misfortunes are they ever allowed to remain in peace for long? The loss of Monsieur de ——, whom death removed at the very moment in which, impelled

by gratitude and all that he did for us from day to day, I was about to reveal my identity to him, was the greatest calamity which could possibly happen to my dear Julie. I need not recall yesterday's events to you. There were too many witnesses of this unfortunate girl's courage and love, for the tale of it not to have reached your ears. She has filled with the same admiration and the same interest all those who have seen the length to which she has pushed virtues foreign to her sex. Can it be that her only reward is to be deprived of a husband, of a friend who adored her? From what she has done for me you may judge of how my loss will affect her. I confide her,' continued the Marquis de —, 'to your keeping. I have already told you that the reputation you enjoy makes me hope that you will not belie it on this occasion. You cannot refuse to help this unfortunate girl. May she have some claim upon the generosity of your heart! Be her protector, and promise me that you will support her warmly in whatever she decides to do. Let me take to the grave the consolation of being sure that her fate will depend upon no one but herself. Here, sir,' he added, taking from beneath his pillow a purse of gold, 'are the means to prevent her from being a burden on you.'

He wished to continue; but, exhausted by all

he had just said, his voice suddenly failed him. I saw a change come over his face. As I drew near to render him assistance, he made an effort to stretch his hand out to Julie, and fell back lifeless. I immediately called my orderly officer, who was waiting for me outside, and told him to fetch the regimental surgeon as quickly as possible. As I had no doubt that the Marquis was dead, I turned all my attention to Julie. She remained standing, her eyes glued to her lover's body, in complete despair. I was afraid of the effect that this sight might have upon her, and I tried to distract her thoughts. I spoke to her several times without being able to get a word from her; I wanted to get her away from all this misery; but my efforts were vain. She remained in the same position, without a word and without shedding a tear, until the arrival of the surgeon who, having by my orders examined the Marquis de —, and taking him for a common soldier, remarked, with that callousness which such people often display, that he was not dead yet. Then, taking a bottle of salts from his pocket he made the Marquis inhale from it until he gradually showed signs of returning consciousness. Interested though I was in his fate, my anxiety for Julie prevented me from losing sight of her. At her lover's first movement she seemed to regain her own senses. Her tense stare seemed to relax, and

I saw joy spreading over her face as he came to himself. I asked her if his wound had been carefully dressed. She described to me in detail how the dressing had been put on. The surgeon at once saw that everything necessary had been neglected. I ordered the dressing to be removed, and I told the surgeon that he would be responsible to me for the care of this wound. I did my best to persuade Julie not to be a witness of a dressing, which I knew would be a painful one, by assuring her that she could rely on me to see that everything that was possible would be done. But I was unable to persuade her.

The surgeon, after probing the wound, told us that, although the bullet had passed right through his body, it had damaged nothing vital in its course and so, not only was the wound not dangerous, but we might even be sure that it would heal quickly. This unexpected news nearly had a serious effect upon Julie. The transition from the depths of despair to extreme hopefulness created in her a revulsion of feeling that was too strong for her. I saw her lose all her colour, and I was alarmed lest her condition should have a bad effect upon the Marquis, who was already exhausted by the weakness that had come over him after his long story. So I drew near her and again pleaded with her to come away. She understood me at once, and that same Julie whom,

a few moments since, I had been quite unable to tear away from an object that was so dear to her, had sufficient courage to leave him, as soon as she thought she might be causing him the slightest anxiety by remaining. Only true love is capable of such a supreme effort, and it supported her until the moment when, out of her lover's sight, it seemed suddenly to leave her. Her knees bent beneath her, and I only just had time to put out my arm to save her from falling. My efforts, however, soon revived her, and even before she found her voice again she made signs to me to return to the Marquis.

At first I did not go, as I did not want to leave her alone in her enfeebled state; but when I saw that, by insisting, I was doing her more harm than good, I complied. On going back to the stable I told my orderly officer, in a voice low enough not to be overheard, to go and look after Julie. As soon as the Marquis saw me, he beckoned to me to come near, and with an effort pronounced Julie's name. I guessed the anxiety in his mind from the look in his eyes; I told him that I had decided to remove him from his uncomfortable surroundings to my own quarters, and that Julie had insisted on making all the necessary preparations herself. He believed me, for it is easy to deceive a lover by playing upon his love. He was all the more convinced because

I ordered the surgeon to have a stretcher made, and to detail a sufficient number of soldiers to carry out my project. Shortly afterwards Julie reappeared. Her whole face was alight with joy; but she only showed enough for the Marquis to be entirely reassured about her condition, and hid her overwhelming emotion. The one thought that engrossed her was the fear of doing him harm.

They were now both in my own quarters. Although the Marquis's father was my friend, I could not make up my mind as to the right course to pursue to help these two lovers. The fear of doing something imprudent made me reject every suggestion that came into my mind. But an unexpected event solved my difficulties. Shortly after the Marquis had been brought to my quarters, I received a letter from his father, who began by recalling our early friendship. After describing at length the details of his son's flight, this letter went on to express the despair in which both he and the Comte were at having driven their children to such extremes. He added that, after endless inquiries, he had come to the conclusion that Julie and his son were with the army, and begged me to make every possible effort to ascertain if this were true. He thought that I should be the more willing to carry out his request as, were I able to discover them, he

charged me with the mission of telling them that their fault was forgiven, and that their fathers desired nothing but to see them, and by their tenderness towards them to make them forget all their misfortunes.

This letter, which was relief enough to me, threw our lovers into the wildest delight. I immediately sent a messenger to the Marquis's father, with a letter in which I told him that they were both with me, without giving any further details. I invited him to return with the messenger, bringing the Comte with him, so as to give me the pleasure of myself telling them what had befallen their children. I need hardly say that they lost not a moment in accepting this invitation. I declare that I have never, in the whole course of my life, witnessed anything so touching as the meeting of these four people. Their joy, their affection for one another, have not relaxed for a moment during the two days they have been reunited. I, too, share their happiness, but I do not think I shall do so for long. The Marquis's wound grows better day by day, and soon they will take their happiness home with them to their own people.

End of THE SOLDIER LOVERS

ALONZO

ALONZO

AT the early age of twenty-five, Alonzo was in command of the Spanish armies during the last wars they fought against the Moors. His youth, his birth, his valour and his charm made a hero of this young Prince, whilst his natural qualities made him a great man. All Alonzo's friendship and affections were centred on Carlos, who fully returned these feelings for Alonzo. The passionate love of Carlos for Leonora, daughter of Alvarez, only opened his heart still further to that sweet emotion which friendship brings to virtuous minds, and made him love Alonzo all the more.

These two friends left for Africa together. They appeared like two tutelary stars at the head of the Spanish troops. Although Alonzo could not share with Carlos the rank of general, he shared all the authority of that rank. Their commands were respected equally. An army with such leaders at its head was certain to be victorious. At length there came the memorable day of the battle of Oran, which decided the fate of the Moors and put an end to the war in Africa.

Every one knows what cruelty followed that terrible battle. Blood flowed in torrents. The Royal Family was exterminated, with the solitary

exception of Zanga, a young man of eighteen, who had seen his father and brothers slaughtered, his sisters outraged, his country laid waste, and his palaces reduced to ashes; he himself was in bondage, covered with ignominy, the plaything of the roughest of the soldiery.

For some time Alonzo did not know that this Prince had fallen into his hands. As soon as he heard of it, he removed his shackles with his own hands, and Zanga was treated with the respect due to his birth and his misfortunes; but the young African's ferocity and pride made him concentrate on Alonzo all the hatred and contempt he felt for the barbarities of which he had been the victim.

This great victory, which filled the army with joy, cost Alonzo a great many tears, for it had been purchased at the cost of his friend's blood. Carlos, to make certain of victory, had been too careless of his own safety, and had been wounded and captured. Uncertainty as to his fate filled Alonzo with the most terrible anxiety. At last, from the depths of his prison, Carlos wrote to his friend, telling him that the price of his ransom had been fixed at ten thousand Moors. Carlos was set free and brought back to Oran.

Who can describe the moment of the meeting of these two friends? Alonzo refused to leave Carlos for a moment, though his wounds were

not mortal. They were even hoping that they would soon be able to leave together to return to Spain, when Alonzo received an order from the Court to return immediately to Madrid. He found himself compelled to leave his friend. They made their farewells in the deepest grief. It was as though they were parting never to meet again. As they bade each other farewell, Carlos said to Alonzo:

‘Go and enjoy the honours that await you; I do not envy you; that you know. My only regret is Leonora; you must see her, and you must watch over her heart. In her I confide to you what I hold most dear in the whole world.’

With these words, Carlos embraced his friend once more, and Alonzo left for Spain, taking with him Zanga, whose misfortunes he was endeavouring to alleviate.

Alonzo arrived in Madrid. Before presenting himself to the King, he fled whither friendship called him: he went to Leonora, his friend’s sweetheart of whom he had so often heard, but upon whom he had never set eyes. His love of hunting and of literature, his somewhat violent nature, perhaps even a certain inborn timidity, had kept him from all dealings with women, in whose presence he always felt embarrassed. Besides, Leonora lived in great retirement with an ambitious and miserly father. This father,

Alvarez, received Alonzo as the hero of Spain and as the friend of the man for whom he destined his daughter.

Not a day passed in which Alonzo did not see Leonora, to whom he spoke incessantly of Carlos. Leonora's modesty, her gentleness, intelligence and sensitiveness all enchanted Alonzo. How fortunate his friend seemed to him! He found it inexpressibly delicious to talk of Carlos with such a lovely person. It was quite a new pleasure for this young hero. Until now he had thought of women without any emotion and almost without any pleasure, and he did not know that their greatest attraction is to the mind of man. Carlos had never really been in love, but he had too many fine qualities not to have an affectionate nature. Alonzo, in order to interest Leonora, no longer confined himself to picturing to her his friend's love: he tried to rouse tender reflections in her, and thus he began insensibly to focus upon himself those emotions which he was only trying to excite in his friend's favour. He began to speak less to her of her lover and more of herself. He was in love with Leonora, desperately in love with her, and he did not yet admit it to himself. But Leonora had known it for a long time. As soon as he realized his passion, his demeanour altered. Neither his character nor his conversation was the same; but in reality he

was only changing the method by which he expressed his love. Well might he appear gloomy, distracted, fanciful, melancholy; these outward signs merely became stronger reasons for Leonora to love him. His confusion, his reproaches, his ill-humour, his silences, all told Leonora what his attentions, his kindness, his charm had already told her. And yet she had not yet heard the words 'I love you', because Alonzo had not yet uttered them. He had examined his own soul in its very depths, and he had seen the love that burnt there; but, sure of himself, he saw cause only for pity, not for blame. He wanted to flee, but he immediately reproached himself for the thought as for a weakness and an act of treachery towards his friend.

Proud mortal who thinks himself strong enough to resist love and the charm of woman! And who, ravaged by uncontrollable passion, denies its formidable empire over man!

Alonzo went on seeing Leonora every day. Each day he discovered in her fresh qualities, new susceptibilities and charm, and new beautiful thoughts. When he was not with her he spoke of her to Zanga, who encouraged him in this passion. For Zanga, whose father, brothers, and subjects he had sacrificed, was by this time completely in his confidence.

Alonzo passed several months in this way,

nursing a love which he detested and which he thought he was always vanquishing. But when he heard that Carlos was returning, the full horror of his position came home to him. He tore the veil from his eyes. In his agitation he called in vain upon that virtue which had never yet abandoned him, and which now told him to take refuge in flight. Firmly resolved to make this great sacrifice, he could not refuse himself the sorry satisfaction of telling Leonora of the motives that decided his flight.

He stood before her for some time without uttering a word. At last he told her the pathetic story of his love and of the sorrows and torments he was suffering.

‘I am surprised at the conqueror of Africa!’ exclaimed Leonora. ‘I imagined that such emotions only came to those he had vanquished. Your love is a crime, for it betrays your friendship.’

‘How cruel you are!’ retorted Alonzo. ‘You should be thankful for this crime. It is the only excuse for your inhumanity. If I did not offend against Heaven and Earth, would you dare thus to heap your scorn upon me? Ah! Leonora, Leonora!’ he continued, ‘what have I done? To serve my friend I sought you out; for his sake I spoke to you; I asked nothing from you but your regard. Soon I began to love you. For long have

I sighed; to-day I am dying. Are you not sufficiently avenged, Leonora, by the torments I am suffering?’

‘I should be avenged,’ she replied, ‘were you suffering alone.’

‘But who is suffering with me?’ asked Alonzo eagerly.

‘Be wise in your ignorance, and let me go!’ cried Leonora, turning away.

‘You are crying!’ exclaimed Alonzo. ‘Heavens! You are crying! What is the meaning of your tears? Tell me, speak . . .! why are you crying so?’

‘I do not know,’ replied Leonora; ‘go away! Leave me alone! Go away!’

Alonzo threw himself distractedly at Leonora’s feet. At last he had torn from her heart that secret for which he longed but which he dreaded so much finding there. He read it in her soul; he read there that he had inspired her with a great emotion, and that he was adored by the woman he loved; but he also saw the awfulness of this fatal passion.

Leonora confessed to him that she had never in her heart loved his friend, and that she had but obeyed her father in listening to him, but that Alvarez, seeing how distasteful the marriage was to her, and hearing at the same time that Carlos was ruined, had decided to break the

engagement or, rather, was withholding his decision until he had consulted Alonzo. Alonzo staggered under this fresh blow. What a moment in which to be compelled to decide either his friend's fortune or his own—the moment in which Fate had dealt so unkindly with Carlos. Leonora guessed the struggle that was going on in his heart from his silence.

'You are trembling,' she said to him. 'Ah, you are frightened for my sake! But you must decide. My father has left everything in your hands.'

'Alas!' cried Alonzo. 'It is in my power, then, to assassinate my friend?'

'No!' replied Leonora. 'You can be kinder than that. You can assassinate Leonora! These words distress you,' she went on; 'they even frighten me. My fault is a grave one; I admit it. But do not blame me alone: keep some of your reproaches for the man who is really responsible for my guilt.'

'Alas,' replied Alonzo, 'the happiness to which I never dared aspire, and yet for which I long to live, is going to bring me to a dreadful death! Oh! Leonora, why do you not hate me?'

'Forgive me,' she replied, 'for loving you. I have struggled against it far longer and even more resolutely than you have.'

'Leonora!' interrupted Alonzo. 'You know I look upon your love as the greatest boon in the

world. Alas! it is the price of a year of suffering, of sighing, of sorrow: a sad reward indeed! But can I bring myself to plunge a dagger into my friend's heart? Speak! say something, Leonora.'

'Was it for you, ungrateful wretch,' she replied, 'to grow tired of our love so soon? Do you imagine that my passion is so strong or my virtue so frail that you can force my secret from me with impunity? Why did you take so much pains to win my heart, if you merely wanted to break it? For shame! But I deserve my punishment. When women demean themselves to such a point, they deserve to be disdained. You loathe and despise me. It is natural that you should. I loathe and despise myself.'

When she finished speaking she seemed to lose control over herself, and started walking distractedly about the room. She was not strong enough to suffer such a violent emotion for long, and soon relapsed into a state of the deepest depression. Alonzo kept his eyes fixed upon her without uttering a word, and making no attempt to console her. Several hours passed like this, a few broken sentences being all that passed between the lovers. Their eyes frequently met and glanced away again. Alonzo was the first to break this silence.

'I have decided,' he declared. 'No, Leonora, no! I am yours for ever, in spite of Carlos... Oh!

what am I saying? My unfortunate friend! I see the shadow of death hovering above him! I hear his cries as he tears his own entrails! He is bathed in blood, dying in despair! Cruel Leonora! Take my life, but leave me my friend.'

It was precisely at this terrible moment that Carlos appeared. Alonzo's affection for Carlos was very great, and its outpouring in his arms was so fervid that Carlos did not notice Leonora's distress. Alonzo's greeting of his friend was perfectly sincere; he saw in him the safeguard of his honour, and his soul was flooded once more with peace.

Carlos wept upon Alonzo's shoulder. The emotion which the sight of his friend caused him called forth the tears which all his misfortunes had been unable to draw from him. On his return to Spain, Carlos had learnt of the total loss of the vast fortune he possessed in America. From being the most powerful man in Castile, he saw himself reduced to being the most wretched. But it was not his fortune he regretted. It was Leonora that he feared to lose. He gazed at her wretchedly, not daring to address her. Alvarez came in, and in a moment Carlos saw, from the coldness of his greeting, that all his fears were realized. It was not difficult for Alonzo to see how sick his friend was at heart, and he led him away from this painful scene to his own house.

Once alone with his friend, Carlos burst into floods of tears and unburdened himself of all his woes. Alonzo did his best to calm him.

‘Alas! what hope can there be?’ returned Carlos. ‘You know Alvarez: his daughter is lost to me for ever. I shall die, my dear Alonzo; I shall die if I lose her. Oh, my friend, how I shall regret you!’

Alonzo pointed out to him that the signal services he had rendered the State gave him the right to expect a very great reward, and that the King’s munificence might yet re-establish his fortune and render him worthy of the daughter of Alvarez. These words soothed Carlos in some small measure, and, indeed, when he left he was calmer than Alonzo.

The sight of his friend had revived all his waning strength. Full of a project which showed his true character, he craved audience with the King and asked and obtained from him the Governorship of Castile for Carlos. He then went straight to Alvarez, informed him of the favour conferred by the King on Carlos, and himself offered to make over to him the vast lands he possessed in Andalusia. Alvarez was surprised at the generosity of Alonzo’s offer; but he knew men. Living at Court and grown old in intrigue, he believed them all to be vicious, and thought he could discover even their most secret motives. He was

fully aware of Alonzo's passion for his daughter, and he founded the very highest hopes on that passion. From that moment he resolved to break off his daughter's engagement to Carlos and to secure Alonzo as his son-in-law. He therefore gave him full credit for what he had done and, so that he might reap the benefit of it, he gave him to understand that he would never give his daughter's hand to Carlos.

Alvarez openly repudiated the understanding he had with Carlos. Carlos pleaded with him in vain. He received none but the most distant and uncompromising replies. Alvarez made no secret to him of Alonzo's offers, or that he had refused them. The unfortunate Carlos read his final dismissal in Leonora's eyes. He betook himself to Alonzo, and found him as harassed as he was himself. Alonzo embraced him and looked at him with eyes that held all the bitterness of his soul. He could not trust himself to speak: he wanted Carlos to remain ignorant of his love. He wanted to unite them, to enjoy his friend's happiness, to triumph over a passion he considered to be criminal. He still hoped to win Alvarez round, and therefore he saw no object in confiding to Carlos a secret which might embitter him. But all his efforts with Alvarez were in vain, nor could he struggle against Leonora's charm and tears. Alvarez was inflexible and, on the advice of Zanga,

spread it about that he was going to give his daughter to Don Pedro, one of the most powerful nobles in Spain. This rumour soon reached Alonzo's ears, and was confirmed by Zanga. Thus it appeared that both Carlos and he were about to lose the woman they loved.

'It is no longer a question of making a sacrifice to friendship,' said Zanga to him. 'Leonora can never be your friend's wife. Tell him of your passion for her. Carlos loves you, and since it is impossible for him to marry Leonora, why should he not consent to see her in his friend's arms?'

'How little do you know the power of love!' answered Alonzo. 'If it be influenced by jealousy, it ignores even the most sacred bonds. I love Carlos, but I know only too well what torment I suffered when I tried to give Leonora to him. I fear for him the same pain that I suffered then.'

'My lord,' retorted Zanga, 'your sense of honour is leading you astray, it leads you blindly to your undoing. Remember that Alvarez has broken off Leonora's marriage with Carlos; his refusal was dictated by avarice and ambition. He will be able to satisfy these passions of his by giving his daughter to Don Pedro: to-morrow you will lose her.'

'So you think, Zanga,' asked Alonzo, 'that, if I spoke to Carlos, his kindness would resign him to

seeing me married to Leonora . . .? But it is a terrible thing even to ask it of him!’

‘You seem to me,’ observed Zanga, ‘to hesitate too much in dealing with a friend who owes you his life and liberty.’

‘That is precisely the reason that holds me back,’ returned Alonzo. ‘Were I not his friend, I could talk to him with greater freedom.’

‘Then, Alonzo,’ said Zanga, ‘I will speak to him myself; I myself will make a demand on the deep friendship that Carlos has for you.’

Zanga left Alonzo and sought out Carlos. He told him of his friend’s love for Leonora, and gave him a full account of Alonzo’s noble efforts to make her marry Carlos. He confirmed him in what he knew already, namely, that Don Pedro was to marry her and that they would both lose her if he did not now do for Alonzo what Alonzo had done for him; in fact, unless he himself urged him to marry Leonora.

‘So,’ cried Carlos, ‘it is not enough that I should die: I must be tortured even in the grave. Does Alonzo expect me to thrust him into Leonora’s arms with my own hands? Oh, Leonora! I cannot do it!’

For a long while the wretched Carlos was torn in this struggle between friendship and love. He was losing Leonora for ever; could he also take her away from his friend, who had so recently

given him a proof of what a courageous friendship is capable? But he could not bring himself to pronounce his own sentence. He left Zanga without making any promise.

It is only in moments of solitude and reflection such as these that a man can decide to make those dire sacrifices to which prayers, force, reasoning, even a woman's tears can never compel him.

Carlos was in this state of mind when Alonzo appeared before him.

'Well, Carlos!' said Alonzo, 'what have you decided to do?'

Carlos made no reply.

'Carlos, if you but knew how I suffer your sorrows with you. And I feel that perhaps I have been the means of increasing them. You charged me to watch over Leonora; but, alas! I could not prevent myself from falling in love with her. Revile me if you will; let the world learn from my perfidy the sanctity of the name of *friend*.'

'You are accusing yourself unjustly,' protested Carlos. 'Alvarez alone is the cause of all my ills. Your crime, Alonzo, is mine; I alone was guilty, in making you run a risk in which your honour could not but succumb, even though I knew to what a formidable proof I was putting it. For who could resist the lure of Leonora's eyes? My love for her pleads for you and finds excuses for you.'

'Ah!' cried Alonzo, 'you are trying to make light of my treachery, but do not think that I am deceived. If you ever forgive me it shows that you are as generous as I am disloyal.'

'Forgive you?' exclaimed Carlos. 'Forgive you, my friend, who even this morning rejected Leonora and her passion for you? But it was like you, my loyal friend, to resist her charm and to bar your heart against her sweet seductiveness! So long as I live, I will live for you. My prayers will be only for you and for your happiness.'

'Oh, Carlos!' replied Alonzo, seizing his hand, 'why cannot you read into the depths of my soul? You would see how loyal it is to you!'

'Alas! my friend,' continued Carlos, 'you weep and embrace me tenderly; you are bowed beneath a heavy load of sorrow; you hardly dare to speak to me; that is not right, my dear Alonzo. You wrong me in not confiding in me when I see how you are suffering. Have you forgotten the closeness of our friendship? Liberty, life itself, are but the smallest proofs I have received of your friendship.'

'My friend,' exclaimed Alonzo sadly, 'how difficult it is to ask when one is sure of not being refused!'

'So you admit,' said Carlos, 'that you have something to ask of me?'

'No, upon my soul!' protested Alonzo.

‘Well, then, if in the generosity of your heart you refuse to ask a favour of me, you must accept without question the one I am doing you.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Alonzo.

‘I beg of you,’ went on Carlos, ‘to listen to me. Fate has bereft me of the person for whom alone I wished to live; I must therefore now follow the dictates of reason. I cannot marry her; she is yours. But, my friend, be tender to her. Remember how weak a woman is: ever uncertain, swayed by emotion, even in the midst of happiness, she is so naturally the object of affliction that it seems as though Heaven had taken a delight in creating her for sorrow, and that she should never be so appealing as when she is in tears. Take my heart for Leonora’s dowry; be her guardian and my friend, always. Let her only be happy: promise me her happiness.’

‘What, Carlos!’ cried Alonzo, ‘can you bear to cast Leonora off?’

‘I am not casting her off,’ replied Carlos; ‘I am giving her to you. Believe me,’ he went on, ‘I am quite sincere, and I am only doing what is right. Were you not prepared to sacrifice her to me? I am merely following the example you have so nobly set me.’

Alonzo was too touched to be able to reply. He could only express his gratitude by his

emotion. Carlos left his friend and hastened to Leonora. He found her just as agitated as Alonzo himself. Her dignity and pride were deeply wounded by Alonzo's behaviour. But love insists on making itself heard, and she was soon persuaded that Alonzo's attitude only made him worthy of her love. And so Leonora and Alonzo were married.

Their joy was not even disturbed by the unspoken regrets they might have harboured for making Carlos unhappy. He seemed quite calm, and appeared to have forgotten his own woes in the spectacle of his friend's happiness. But this happiness was not destined to endure. One day a letter from Carlos, addressed to Leonora, fell into Alonzo's hands. This letter was full of protestations of undying love. In a flash a veil seemed to fall from Alonzo's eyes. He remembered how these two once loved each other; in their separation he could now see nothing but the commands of Alvarez, and in the generosity of Carlos the treachery necessary to his love. Beside himself with fury, he sent for Zanga and showed him the intercepted letter. Zanga read it, and, in a fit of indignation, destroyed it. Then, controlling himself, he endeavoured to banish from Alonzo's mind the suspicions which it had aroused. Alonzo allowed himself to be convinced; but one day chance led him to the discovery, in

Leonora's room, of a casket which he had never seen before. He examined it and, deciding that it held some secret, he broke it open and found within it a portrait—the portrait of Carlos. All his suspicions were re-aroused. Again Zanga endeavoured to calm them. In vain did he tell him that this portrait had long been in Leonora's possession. This time nothing could persuade Alonzo. At last Zanga suggested that he should go away for a few days, promising him to keep a careful watch on Leonora's conduct during his absence. Alonzo embraced his dear Zanga gratefully, and on the following day, left for Valladolid. But he could not remain there. Tormented by his thoughts, eaten up by jealousy, he hurried back to Madrid, and there, from the look in Zanga's eyes, he read what he dreaded so much to learn. Zanga tried, without success, to disguise his thoughts. Alonzo compelled him to confess everything; and from what he learnt he could no longer entertain any doubts about Leonora's infidelity.

How easily the idea of guilt can gain the upper hand in a mind racked by jealousy! The death of Carlos appeared to the wretched Alonzo to be no more than justice due. He charged Zanga with the task of assassinating him, reserving to himself the right of revenging himself on his wife for her treachery. Arming himself with a dagger, he

entered Leonora's room. He found her asleep, and he was astonished that a woman so steeped in guilt could enjoy such peaceful slumber. Her beauty stayed his hand and made him hesitate. He thought of the thousand kisses he had bestowed where he was now about to strike. At length he steeled his heart against her fascination and drew near her with averted eyes. At that moment Leonora awoke, and saw the dagger poised above her breast.

'What are you doing?' she cried.

Bitter reproaches poured forth from Alonzo's lips.

'How can you, my husband, say such things to me? How can you think of taking my life, every moment of which bears witness to my great love for you? What have I done, to be treated so?'

'Oh, the perfidy of woman!' exclaimed the jealous Alonzo. 'It is with such words as these that you deceive me. Brazen woman! Who has told you that I wished to take your life? Who has told you that I suspected your virtue? Not this dagger, but the voice of your conscience.'

'Heavens!' cried Leonora. 'I wish I could doubt my ears. But you, cruel wretch, force me to believe them. But you will live to regret it!'

'It is useless,' replied Alonzo, 'for you to try to hide your guilt. Your wiles no longer deceive me.'

'My wiles?' repeated Leonora, in a passion of indignation.

'Yes,' returned Alonzo; 'you need not hope to soften me by your tears.'

'I disdain to answer you; you are insolent!' said Leonora proudly.

Then Alonzo, to confront her with her infidelity, showed her the portrait of Carlos. Leonora took it in her hands and examined it for a long time.

'Ah! it is Carlos,' she said. 'He would have made me happy.'

'Now, traitress, will you admit your guilty love?'

'What?' she pleaded. 'Do you still persist in thinking me to be guilty?'

'How can I doubt it?'

'Then,' cried Leonora, seizing the dagger from him and plunging it into her bosom, 'may this stroke reach your heart!'

She fell into her husband's arms. Gathering her remaining strength, she said to him:

'That is the only revenge I can take upon you for your injustice! Believe me guilty now, if you will . . .'

And with these words she fell back dead, leaving her husband staring at the wife he had just assassinated.

The sight of her drove him almost mad with

despair. He was about to follow her example, when Zanga entered, his hands still stained with the blood of the unfortunate Carlos.

‘Oh, Zanga!’ said Alonzo to him.

‘Control yourself,’ commanded Zanga, ‘and tell me why you are weeping.’

‘Alas! Have I not cause to weep?’

‘More than you think,’ replied Zanga; ‘for I have deceived you.’

‘Am I dreaming?’ cried Alonzo.

‘No,’ replied Zanga. ‘Your wife was innocent. It was I who persuaded Carlos to give Leonora up to you. I forged the letter. I contrived that the portrait should fall into her hands. I hated and despised you, and now I have destroyed you.’

‘Inhuman slave!’ cried Alonzo.

‘Vile Christian!’ retorted Zanga. ‘How little you knew my character. What am I? A Moor; a slave. Woe to him who cast me into chains! I am revenged! What else could you expect from a prince whose father and brothers fell beneath your blows, whose kingdom was ravaged by your fury, whose fetters have profaned your glory? What remains to me of the rank to which I was born? Nothing but its memory; that and my revenge. I have no treasures but your torments and your groans. When men ask you who made you suffer, tell them it was the Moor, the implacable Moor. If cold-blooded Northerners

condemn my vengeance, warn them not to judge creatures who are their superiors, and to whose fierce souls vengeance is a virtue.'

Zanga finished speaking, and plunged his dagger into his heart, giving the wretched Spaniard an example which he lost no time in following.

End of ALONZO

THE HERMIT

THE HERMIT

I WILL spare you, my dear S——, the recital of the love story of Monsieur de Saint-Laurent, a gentleman from Dauphiny, and Mademoiselle de Vallersun. All that you need to know is that, being compelled to elope with her on August 21, 1761, he took her to Savoy, where he married her. On his way thither, however, he met with a very extraordinary adventure.

Our two lovers fled quite unattended, and followed the course of the Isère. On arriving in the midst of the Grande-Chartreuse mountains after a very heavy day, they were obliged to seek shelter at ten o'clock at night in a house to which they were guided from afar off by a light, and which was built on a hill in the depths of a wood, as hermitages usually are. And, indeed, there they found an old hermit, who welcomed them effusively, offered them shelter in his retreat, and seemed much concerned at having nothing to offer them for supper but a dish of roots, and nothing but straw upon which to sleep. Our young lovers, however, were only too glad to be under cover, and after their frugal repast they begged the hermit to get the bed ready for them. The good man set to work at once with the

greatest care, and when he had done, asked permission to take his leave.

Monsieur de Saint-Laurent and Mademoiselle de Vallersun fell immediately into such a deep sleep that, at two in the morning, Mademoiselle de Vallersun, who was sleeping next to the wall, did not notice that she was being lowered away from Monsieur de Saint-Laurent by means of a secret mechanism, so that she was presently landed in a deep cellar, more than fifty feet below ground. The trap-door shut again with a bang, and Mademoiselle de Vallersun woke with a start. The unfortunate girl's feelings may be imagined when she suddenly found herself in a gloomy chamber, lit only by one dim lamp, and, feeling for her lover's hand, felt her own seized and held by a young hermit who was on his knees beside her.

'Merciful heavens!' she cried. 'Have pity on me, I am lost!'

And she fell into a swoon. The treacherous ministrations of the wretch into whose hands she had fallen merely added to the horror of her position.

Monsieur de Saint-Laurent woke up. His first act was to see if Mademoiselle de Vallersun was still sleeping. To his amazement, he found that she was no longer beside him! He rose quickly and called her anxiously by name, without any

result; by this time he was beginning to be thoroughly alarmed, and started to shout for her in a voice in which emotion and fear struggled for the mastery. After searching for some time he found the old hermit.

‘You scoundrel!’ he bellowed at him; ‘where have you hidden the object of my affections, the happiness of my whole life?’

Then, dragging him into the room, he seized one of his pistols, held it to the hermit’s throat and again asked him for Mademoiselle de Val-lersun.

‘Mercy, my lord, mercy!’ screamed the hermit; ‘I am not to blame; but if you do not kill me I will tell you how to get her back; once again let me beg of you to listen to me, to moderate your voice and to follow my advice.’

‘Go on, you brute, and be quick about it.’

‘Well, then, my lord, leave here without losing a moment; try to find a woman who is willing to follow you, who is pretty and who will do your bidding. Bring her here and I can promise to restore your wife to you.’

‘What do you mean, you wretch? How dare you insult me like this? Prepare to die! You have driven me too far already!’

Monsieur de Saint-Laurent tried everything with the old hermit that his despair and rage suggested and indeed justified. Nothing could

shake this man's attitude. All he would say was:

'You can kill me, but you can get nothing further from me.'

What was he to do? Our lover stopped torturing the hermit, and asked him to repeat his instructions. There seemed nothing for it but to comply; so he started for Turin. On arriving there he set about finding a young and pretty courtesan whose only thought was of money. He easily persuaded one to follow him, telling her that he was taking her to one of his properties, where his intention was to live with her. He took her back to the hermitage, terrified lest he should find the hermit gone. Fortunately he found him almost immediately, and asked him in a whisper whether he could still count on his promise.

'Yes, my lord, I will keep my word to you. Bring Madame in, and pay careful attention to what I am telling you. You will have something to eat; I will prepare a straw bed for you as I did the day before yesterday, and I warn you that at exactly two o'clock you will feel a movement beneath you. You must be careful to lie down at the side near the wall. Let yourself be lowered without a movement or a sound. Do not wake the young woman who is with you. Follow all this out carefully, and I promise you that you will recover what you are seeking.'

Alarming though all this mystery was, Monsieur de Saint-Laurent could not draw back now. He sat down to eat, and lay down shortly before two o'clock. On the stroke of two he heard a slight noise, and felt himself beginning to descend; in due course he arrived in the cave. The first object that met his gaze was Mademoiselle de Vallersun's dress. As he was about to rush towards her he saw a young hermit in the corner of the chamber; he leaped towards him, seized him by the throat and stabbed him to the heart, crying:

'Monster! Give me back my wife!'

He heard a cry and, leaving the wretched man in his death-throes, he fled towards the voice of his beloved mistress and fell exhausted into her arms. Before, however, he lost consciousness, he heard the hermit say, in a dying voice:

'Wretch! I am dying; in another quarter of an hour all that my assassin robs me of would have been mine.'

Our young lovers recovered their senses, and with the help of the trap-door mechanism they soon set themselves at liberty.

Monsieur de Saint-Laurent kept his word to the old hermit, and gave a thousand pistoles to the courtesan; and the two lovers, having escaped from hell, made haste to get married in the first town they came across in Savoy.

Who was this old man? What connexion was there between him and the young reprobate who lived in the cave? What was the secret of the condition, imposed by the hermit, that he should bring one pretty woman in order to find another? And lastly, who was the scoundrel who made away with Mademoiselle de Vallersun? These are questions that have never been answered, in spite of endless inquiries set afoot by the Sardinian Government.

End of THE HERMIT

A SPANISH STORY

A SPANISH STORY

THE —th regiment, in which I serve, had been quartered in Seville for three years, when we received orders to leave it in three days' time to go to Valencia, where we were to be in garrison. Late that evening I was busily engaged in paying calls in the city and in attending to various business connected with our impending departure; I was proceeding, quite unaccompanied, down a side street, when I was suddenly set upon by four men, two of whom seized my arms, whilst the third took hold of my legs and the fourth gagged me with a handkerchief. They bore me along in this way, and, despite my struggles, I was carried to the end of the street, where I was thrown into a public carriage and followed by my four attendants. After a long and winding journey the carriage came to a halt and the door was opened. So far as the agitation I was in allowed me to judge, a number of people seemed to be helping my guides to remove me from the carriage, and I was hurried into a house, the door of which immediately slammed to loudly behind me.

I was now set free, but I could not make much use of my freedom, as all my weapons had been removed. I tried to discover from the ruffians

who surrounded me and who looked to me like executioners, to what I was indebted for such treatment, and where I was. Instead of replying, a short stout man, lame in one leg, came up to me and, in a hoarse, gruff voice, told me to follow him. At the same time he made towards an iron-studded door, which opened, revealing a very low and narrow flight of steps. I was in no position to refuse to do anything that was required of me, so I followed my guide without any protest, though this did not prevent one of the underlings from hustling me roughly and treading on my heels. Thus, preceded by my guide and followed by his minion, I went down a dozen winding steps. Another door, also iron-studded, opened and presently, by the glimmer of a lanthorn, I saw that it led into a cell about twelve feet square, containing a heap of straw and a pitcher of water. Hardly had my fat jailer squeezed himself against the wall to let me pass, than the man behind gave me such a violent kick that I fell headlong into the cell. The door immediately closed, leaving me in darkness, and in the contemplation of the wretchedness of my position.

Left to my own reflections, I tried at first to discover whether I had not brought on myself the treatment to which I had been submitted, and, as I could recall no circumstances that might

have led me into conflict with the law, and in view of all that had occurred, it was not difficult for me to conclude that I was in the hands of the Inquisition. It was the worst thing that could possibly happen to me, and I was the more certain of it because of all that I had heard of that terrible tribunal.

I had been given the most lurid details of what I might expect, by one of my brother officers who had been denounced to the Inquisition by a girl whose favours he had rewarded in too niggardly a fashion; consequently I passed a night of dreadful anxiety. In so far as a poor wretch in the depths of a dungeon can calculate time, I suppose it was about five or six o'clock in the morning when I heard the door at the top of the steps open; then the cell door was opened, and my repulsive jailer walked in, carrying his lantern. He bade me follow him. At the top of the steps I found the same four men waiting for me. They seized me in the same way as before, and bore me to a public carriage which was waiting in the street. They got in with me. Although the blinds were drawn I could feel that we kept turning corners, and finally the carriage drew up before a small door, at which I was handed over to two surpliced priests wearing coifs. Their faces were very stern, but they spoke not a word, and walked along, one before and one

behind me. They led me through a very long, dark, narrow passage and then down a flight of steps which led into a fairly large chamber furnished with a few rough chairs. The two priests stopped and, opening a door, signed to me to pass through it.

I found myself in a large room furnished in a bygone style. In the corner, behind a huge writing-table, was seated a man wearing a rochet, a hooded cloak, and a coif, whom I recognized to be the Grand Inquisitor. Without rising, he began a long harangue in a sombre voice on the duties of religion and of honourable men, on the goodness and clemency of God, who forgives us our sins, on the earnest faith we should testify to Him and the repentance we should feel at having offended Him.

As all this was uttered calmly and with unction, and as he spoke to me more as a father than as a judge, I felt somewhat reassured as to the outcome of my adventure, and I told him that I was a very good Christian, firmly convinced of the truths of our religion, fearing God whilst at the same time loving Him, and that if I had offended Him I had done so unwittingly.

‘What!’ exclaimed the Grand Inquisitor. ‘Is there nothing for which your conscience reproaches you?’

‘Nothing whatever,’ I assured him.

‘Very well, then,’ he went on; ‘since your heart is hardened, my son, you must be confronted; we shall see whether you will maintain your attitude, and whether you will not retract your words.’

With this he rang a bell, and a door opened in the side of the room opposite to the one through which I had entered. Through it there entered a young girl of about sixteen or seventeen years of age. I was dazzled by her lovely colouring, her charming features, her soft, starry, black eyes, her thick hair which fell loosely about her shoulders and almost hid her dress, her noble bearing . . . But she was pregnant, and that discounted all her other perfections.

‘Do you know this lady?’ the Grand Inquisitor asked me.

‘No,’ I replied. ‘In fact, this is the first time I have seen anyone so seductive.’

‘You are not asked to be gallant,’ retorted the Grand Inquisitor, frowning and raising his voice. ‘For the second time, do you deny your intimacy with this lady, and that you are responsible for the condition in which you see her?’

‘I certainly deny it absolutely; I have not even the honour of the señorita’s acquaintance.’

‘I have seen many scoundrels,’ replied the Grand Inquisitor; ‘but, O Lord!’ he went on, raising his hands to Heaven, ‘You have never

allowed to appear before me anyone more guilty or more brazen!

‘Wretch!’ he continued, fixing me with a wrathful eye, ‘behold yourself before the Court of the Almighty; you shall pronounce your own sentence. Either let me efface your crime by uniting you, at the altar steps, to the unfortunate victim of your evil heart, or I shall summon the judges who will deliver you to execution; and your anguish, in the dungeons of this house, will not be long in purging the world of a monster such as you.’

A speech of this sort is apt to come as a shock to one, and I confess that it threw me into a whirl of unpleasant reflections. I was quite convinced that his Excellency, having satisfied in the arms of this lovely person the desires that she had aroused in him, now wished to be quit of her; and that, making use of the methods which became so simplified in the hands of a Grand Inquisitor, he had singled me out to relieve him of this burden, as a lonely stranger who had no means of exposing his conduct and frustrating his plans. Although it seemed quite hopeless for me to extricate myself from the predicament in which I found myself, the thought of associating myself with such a companion and of dishonouring not only myself, but also my family, disgusted me so much that even the most shameful

death appeared preferable. I had just reached this decision when the Grand Inquisitor began to speak again:

‘You have fallen into the abyss into which every guilty man stumbles soon or late,’ he said. ‘No subterfuge, no attempt at delay, no scheme whatever will avail you in the Court before which you are appearing; your fate is in your own hands. Marriage or death. Decide!’

‘You are a more cruel despot than any that has ever burdened the earth with his tyrannies!’ I answered him. ‘To save the life which you are making hateful to me, I will not betray the truth nor my duty to myself. I will never agree to what you have the effrontery to demand of me.’

‘Young man,’ pursued the Grand Inquisitor, in a more gentle voice, ‘your courage mitigates the disgust which your guilt inspires, and I begin to feel pity for you. You shall hear Mass, and I trust that Heaven will have mercy on you, and that the Almighty in His goodness will shed a ray of grace upon you. But as soon as this moment of my clemency is passed, remember that you must choose between marriage and death.’

After this pronouncement he rang another bell, and the two priests entered. The Grand Inquisitor made them a sign, and each took me by an arm. I was led in this manner through a short passage into a chapel draped in black,

where my escort forced me to my knees. A priest appeared, and Mass began.

Whether through grace, common sense, or weakness, I soon began to waver in my resolution to hang rather than to marry. By dint of reflecting upon my position I recognized a great truth, which is that death is the greatest of all evils. Once that idea took hold of me, I was not long in finding reasons for considering it to be an excellent one.

‘After all,’ I told myself, ‘of what can I be reproached? Of having embarked on a marriage without love, against my will and for no other motive than the cruel necessity of escaping from the hands of the Inquisition and of its torturers. Who the devil would not do the same in my place? Once out of here, who can compel me to live with a woman who is only fit to abandon to the trade upon which she has so ably embarked? Few will blame me, many will approve, some will even pity me.’

By the end of Mass, then, I had made up my mind. The two priests, my guides, took me back to the Grand Inquisitor’s room in the same way as before.

‘Well,’ he asked. ‘What have you decided?’

‘To do what you wish,’ I replied, ‘and to take the wife you insist on giving me.’

‘Heaven be praised!’ he cried, rising from his

seat and hastening towards me with open arms. 'A ray of grace from on high has pierced the very depths of your soul; the Almighty has indeed been good to you.'

This outburst confirmed my opinion that his Excellency was the villain of the piece, and I saw in it merely the effect of the relief he felt at his plan having worked so well.

The Grand Inquisitor rang again; the young girl appeared, and she seemed to grow even more charming when she heard that I agreed to marry her. A blush spread over her face, heightening the loveliness of her complexion and the brilliance of her eyes, and giving her an air of happiness which made her a thousand times more beautiful. My feelings at that moment were in a turmoil, as I realized that I was about to possess something so utterly desirable and that I was compelled to avoid it as a most contemptible object. I cannot find words to describe these feelings, and I leave the reader to picture them to himself.

The Grand Inquisitor, taking my future wife and myself by the hand, led us into the same chapel in which I had heard Mass; there, after putting on his vestments, he married us, the two priests acting as witnesses. He then made us a short exhortation and, giving us his blessing, he told us that we might depart in peace.

As it was necessary for my wife and me to leave

the house by the same gate, I followed her, quite determined to escape from her as soon as I possibly could. We were already in the courtyard when, turning to me, she said, in such a gentle voice that it touched me to the bottom of my heart and held me as though by magic:

‘It is not difficult for me, señor, to guess what is passing in your mind and what you intend to do; but remember that appearances are sometimes deceptive. It would not be fitting for me, in view of your feelings towards me, to beg you to follow me; but I venture to advise you to do so. Grant me two hours of your time: after that you will be free to do as you wish. A chivalrous man will never refuse a woman an opportunity to justify herself; I could not bear you to harbour contempt and hatred for me for ever.’

As she finished speaking, her eyes filled with tears and she became pitiable in her distress.

‘I do not hate you,’ I assured her, much moved by her condition and words. ‘My bitterness is against those who have seduced you and who have forced me to share the straits to which they have brought you. If I can render you any service, I will do so, on condition that I shall never see you again.’

‘It is too early to pronounce so harsh a sentence,’ she replied. ‘Be brave enough to grant what I ask of you.’

So saying she took one of my hands and pressed it against her bosom. This action of hers, her eyes, her voice and an impulse within me that mastered me against my will, threw me into such a state of agitation that, hardly knowing what I was saying, I promised.

‘Very well,’ I said, ‘have your way. I am at your service, at the risk of anything that may happen to me.’

The girl’s face lit up with great joy when I said this; and, hurrying out of the gates, she led the way towards a public carriage in which she had apparently come. She opened the door herself, and we got in; she said something to the coachman in Spanish, and off we went.

I was so disturbed by all these happenings that my thoughts were quite confused. Each time I looked at the charming object by my side I felt my blood turn to fire in my veins, only to be followed by a deathly chill as I pondered on everything that had happened. The future seemed to hold nothing for me but troubles and regrets, as I thought of my cowardly compliance. I preserved the most complete silence. She, on her side, said nothing either; she kept casting languishing and passionate glances upon me, sighing and showing all the signs of uneasiness and impatience of a person who awaits a moment that she wishes to hurry forward.

After a short journey the carriage drew up before the door of a large house. The coachman opened the door, the girl got out, and I did likewise. She took my hand and drew me into a wide courtyard, where several stable-boys were occupied in grooming horses. I was much surprised at the respect the doorkeeper and all these servants showed to my guide. And yet they seemed to look at her in amazement and to follow her with their eyes. Without addressing a single word to them, she made me mount a wide staircase, at the top of which we entered an antechamber full of liveried servants who rose on seeing her. She passed rapidly through this room, and several others full of aged footmen who hastened to open doors for her.

At length we came to the last door, and at this point all the girl's assurance and animation seemed to abandon her, and to give place to hesitation and fear. As she laid hold of the door-handle she began to tremble violently. I observed all this carefully, and with great surprise, and I saw that it was only by a great effort of self-control that she managed to open the door. In a chair by a fireplace sat an old man, apparently decrepit and infirm, whilst opposite him sat a lady of advancing years, but who had preserved all that age respects in beauty—regular features beneath the wrinkles, and a noble and

imposing bearing which was mitigated by her eyes, which shone with kindliness. My companion threw herself at the old man's feet.

'Father,' she said to him, throwing her arms around his knees, 'have pity on a daughter who has done you a grievous wrong. Dominated by the passion with which this gentleman has inspired me, I tried in vain to crush it. I have fought this feeling with such strength and so resolutely that until to-day he has never set eyes on me; I have been content to see him pass frequently beneath the windows of my room, behind shutters that could not shield me from the shaft with which he wounded me when I first saw him.

'I could not, however, resist the desire to know who it was who had conquered me. I took one of my women into my confidence and she, as is usual with such people, made no difficulties about obeying my behests. By my orders she made inquiries and learnt that Monsieur de —, a scion of an ancient Swiss family, but of small fortune, was a captain in Buch's regiment; that he enjoyed the esteem of his superiors as well as the friendship of his brother-officers and the good wishes of every one in the city who knew him, especially that of Doña —, an intimate friend of my mother who, from her age and the respect due to it, is to be trusted in

forming an opinion of this sort. Although I now felt justified, by the general weight of opinion, in the choice my heart had made, I still did not feel free to emerge from the aloofness which I had prescribed for myself, out of deference for you and for my mother. I lived a life of privation, I admit; but at the same time I enjoyed a certain peace of mind because, since I never endeavoured to follow my inclination, however much I considered it to be justified, I felt quite sure that it would never lead me into doing anything wrong. But how vain is the sense of security born of inexperience! The most violent storms are as nothing compared with the distress which filled my heart when my confidential maid informed me, three days ago, that I was to lose Monsieur de —— for ever, because his regiment had received orders to leave Seville. From that moment, neither the duty I owe to my parents, nor modesty, nor future misery, nor anything else could for a moment weigh against the thought of being deprived of the only object my heart adored, and any step seemed legitimate to me to prevent our separation. The means I took can alone give you some idea of the violence of my passion.

‘Lowering myself to the level of those who are the wretched victims of seduction, I made use of the only resource left to them in this country. I

summoned up courage to write to the Grand Inquisitor, confiding to him that I imagined myself to be in a certain condition.

‘For, señor,’ she went on, turning towards me, ‘it is time for you to be disabused. You will see the extent to which I love you, for Doña Leonora —— was capable of deciding to appear vile in the eyes of all, even in yours, when she decided that this was the only way by which she could unite herself to you.’

She then loosened a concealed girdle and removed a large cushion with which she had deformed the elegance of her figure.

‘The Grand Inquisitor,’ she pursued, turning again to the old man, ‘arrested this gentleman, as is his wont. He was compelled to choose between torture and my hand. Common sense gave me the preference. This, then, is the son-in-law I have presumed to give you; the sole master of my heart. I plead, before your seat of judgement, the laws of Nature and those of religion. If you and my mother reject them in favour of paternal despotism, nothing is left for me but to submit to your decision. Choose, either to make your daughter completely happy by confirming a choice which cannot but be praised; or else, by repudiating it, to condemn her to wear her life away in a cloister, far from everything she loves, detesting, not her judges, but the prejudices of a

century in which false considerations of convention and fortune destroy the right every human being has of moulding his own happiness.'

My surprise and joy as Leonora's tale unfolded itself can easily be understood. With what rapture did I learn that not only was I allowed, but that it even became my duty, to devote myself entirely to such a charming person, and to deserve all that she had done for me. I paid careful attention to the effect which the confession of her conduct had upon her parents. On her mother's face I could see no change except that occasioned by surprise; but the old man's face became suffused with the most terrible rage. He gazed fiercely at his daughter, and seemed to be waiting impatiently for the end of her story.

Hardly had she finished than he tried to give vent to his fury; but he was seized with such a violent fit of coughing that he could not utter a single word. After several useless attempts he suddenly turned sharply in his armchair and, with an angry gesture, signalled to his daughter, without looking at her, to leave his presence. Her mother then rose.

'You see,' she said, 'the state into which you are throwing your father. Do not increase his pain or his righteous anger by disregarding his wishes. Follow me into my apartment. And you, señor, come too,' she added, turning to me.

She then led us, Leonora and me, to her own room, and gave orders that no one whatever was to be admitted. After making sure that her husband was being properly attended to, she bade me be seated and told her daughter to do so as well. But Leonora fell at her feet and seized her hand, which she bathed in tears.

‘Leonora,’ said her mother, ‘I should have thought that your upbringing, since you have been old enough to understand me, would have preserved you from the error into which you have fallen. I thought that in not enslaving you to prejudice, I was doing the best thing to prevent you from defying it. I imagined that to show you everything in its true light was the most certain method of preserving you from illusion, and that, by forestalling experience by the knowledge of the power of passions and of the evils that they bring in their train, you would be able to resist that power. I see now that I only succeeded in destroying in you that timidity which so often shelters young girls. Is there no way,’ she continued, raising her eyes to heaven, ‘of protecting the young? If we enlighten them, they become brazen; warn them of the pitfalls of life, and others will appear which cannot be foreseen. Keep them away from other people, and their passions grow without even being blunted by the advance of years, and their caprices become

still more dangerous. Since all this is part of the laws of Nature, one must submit to it. But what pains me most deeply and most sharply is the want of confidence you have shown in me. Will you venture to deny that I have always been your companion, and have been more like a friend for you than a mother?’

‘Ah, most noble lady—for I am no longer worthy of calling you “mother”,’ interrupted Leonora. ‘Do not utterly crush a wretch who is fully aware of the enormity of her sin. I will submit to everything you are pleased to order for me, even to renouncing the object of my whole tenderness. If any greater sacrifice were possible for me I would make it, in order to atone for the crime I have committed against you.’

‘No, my child,’ replied her mother, folding her in her arms, ‘whatever wrong you may have done me, I will take advantage neither of your repentance nor of my own authority to torment you. You do not know what it means to be condemned in a cloister to the pangs of repentance, which is all the more bitter because it is deprived of any distraction. I will never make such barbarous use of my authority over my daughter, for it would rebound upon myself. Chance has served you better than any forethought of mine could have done; it has given you a husband who has many fine qualities. I know this from

Doña ——, who has frequently told me of her astonishment at finding a young man of his age so self-controlled, so high-principled, and so unswervingly honourable in all his actions. I would even, my child, have yielded to the desire which she gave me to know him, had it not been for the aloofness to which I had condemned myself with the object of avoiding the dangers which I feared for you. He is a poor man; but that is but a small matter in my eyes, seeing that the wealth that awaits you and which cannot but increase so long as your father and I are still living, is more than sufficient for your position in the world.'

Then, after studying her daughter for several moments in silence, with her eyes full of tears, she took her once more in her arms, saying:

'Be comforted, my dear child! And in order to preserve your own happiness, consider only the happiness of the husband you have given yourself. It is the best way of assuring yourself that he himself will try to make you happy. Beware of the impulsiveness of your heart and of the impetuosity of your nature; never fail your husband; for you may be sure that happiness will disappear from the instant in which you have to reproach yourself for anything, and that remorse is a poison whose effects are felt even in the midst of pleasure.'

Then, turning to me again, she said:

‘Sir, you see what your lucky star has brought you: a large fortune, with a wife who possesses both birth and beauty, and whom I beg of you not to judge by what she has done out of passion for you. Though she is naturally ardent and headstrong, these defects are counterbalanced by many virtues and qualities. Be gentle and patient with her so that she may become everything you wish her to be. Make my Leonora happy, and remember that the first duty of an honourable man is to devote himself to the happiness of the companion Heaven has given him. I must return to my husband,’ she went on; ‘his first impulse was an uncontrolled and violent one. But at heart he is wise and good; he loves his daughter, and I shall have little difficulty in bringing him to reason. Stay here, both of you; I will send for you both when the moment is propitious.’

With these words she left the room. I was much impressed by her words, and I did not know which to admire more, her splendid common sense or her kindness. But these feelings soon gave way to others, and I fell at Leonora’s feet and tried to express my gratitude and the love which had but been increased by the necessity for repression. This sweet girl received my transports with a delight which thrilled me. I do not know how long I remained in this state of

ecstasy, but it seemed that we were sent for much sooner than I could have wished. As I entered the father's room I looked at him, and I saw nothing but sternness in his bearing.

'Leonora,' he said to his daughter, 'your mother insists on my forgiving you. Quite apart from my desire to please her, it is perhaps the wisest course in the unfortunate extremity to which you have reduced us. Time will show whether the choice you have made is as wise as people would have me believe, and whether this gentleman deserves the reputation he enjoys. I insist upon one thing only: complete secrecy about everything that has happened; the least indiscretion, one word allowed to escape, will be enough to prevent me from seeing either you or your husband again in this life. Your mother is on her way to see the Grand Inquisitor to try to substitute a union which shall be legal and real in the eyes of the world for a disreputable secret marriage which must be covered with an impenetrable veil. I would rather appear strange in my choice of a son-in-law, and expose myself to the reproaches of my family, than allow my Leonora's reputation to become tarnished.'

And, in fact, everything was carried out according to this plan, and a week later I married Leonora with all the pomp that such an alliance demanded. The public press will inform you of

what I have not ventured to allow myself to disclose, namely, my wife's family name. Scrupulously keeping my word, I have not even confided it to the post, only consenting to render to you personally the homage of confidence which I owe you, and which I am quite sure you will not abuse.

Although a fortnight has now passed since this most extraordinary adventure happened to me, it still amazes me so much, that sometimes even now I ask myself whether it was not, after all, a dream.

I beg to remain, etc.

End of A SPANISH STORY

DATE

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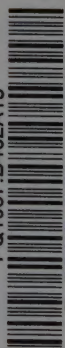
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